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# Egyptianization: Culture hacking as a method

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مصري  
EGYPTIANIZATION  
زيشن



CULTURE  
HACKING

إختراق الثقافة

AS A METHOD



هدير  
HADER  
عمر  
OMAR



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Approval certificate for  
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**Egyptianization:  
Culture hacking  
as a method.**

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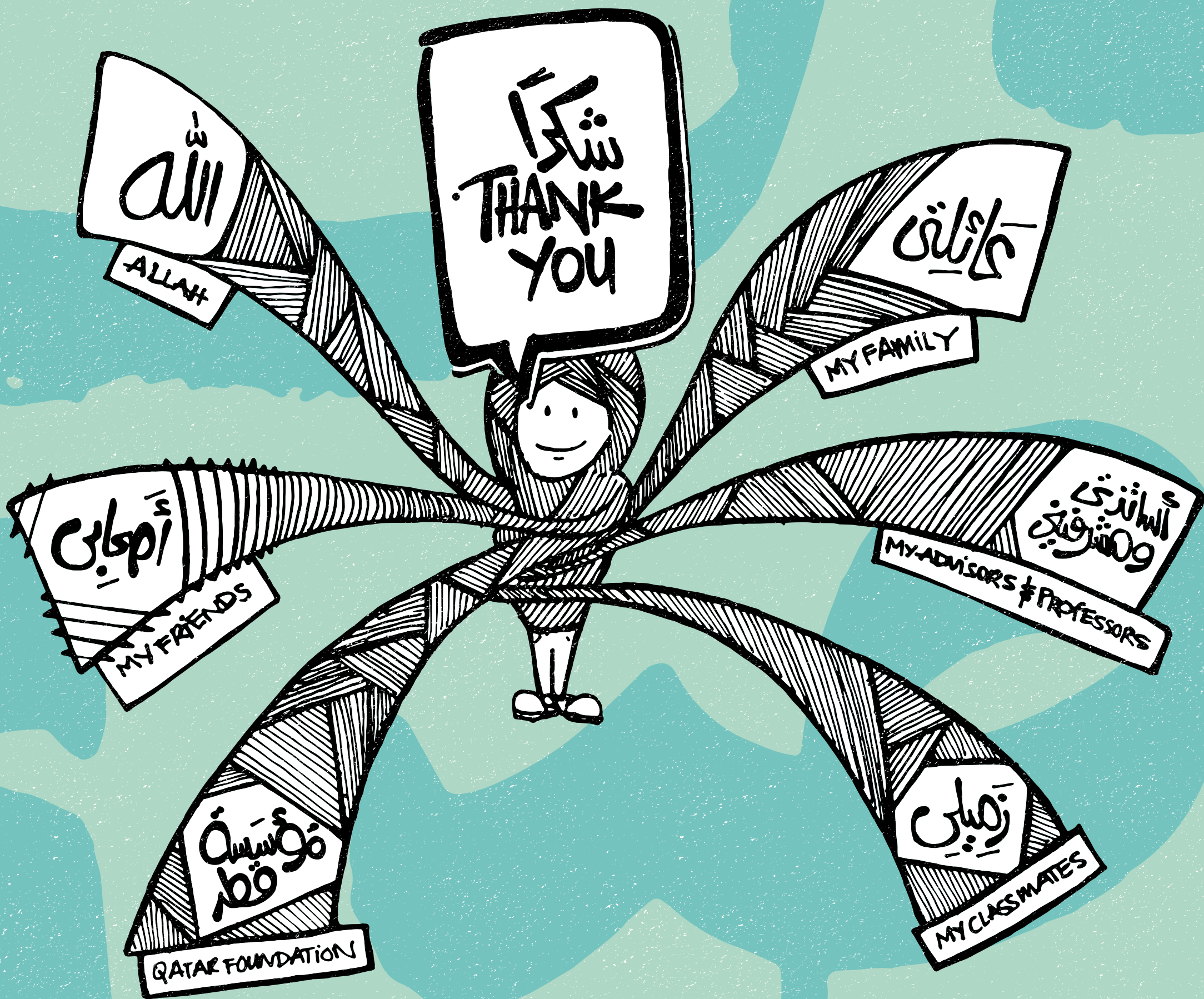
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In a broad sense, cultures undergo a metamorphosis due to the external influences and systems impacting the evolution of internal identities. Conversely, Individuals within a culture react to those external influences and systems. The act of hacking a culture is an opportunity to challenge an existing or imported system in order to bring about change and improvement. An aspect of culture hacking is to create messages of satire or irony in order to criticize, or completely reject established systems within cultures.

Post Arab spring, Egyptians practiced culture hacking by applying their cultural tools to external systems and influences, producing a process of 'Egyptianization'. This investigation examines the MFA program's culture at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar as a case study, and adapts those Egyptianized tools to hack the culture. The program has its own values, rituals, traditions, imported systems, influences and dominant symbols. The aim of this thesis is to generate customized hacking methodologies that identify cracks within this culture and develop an innovative framework to critically analyze them through visual representation.



Introduction:

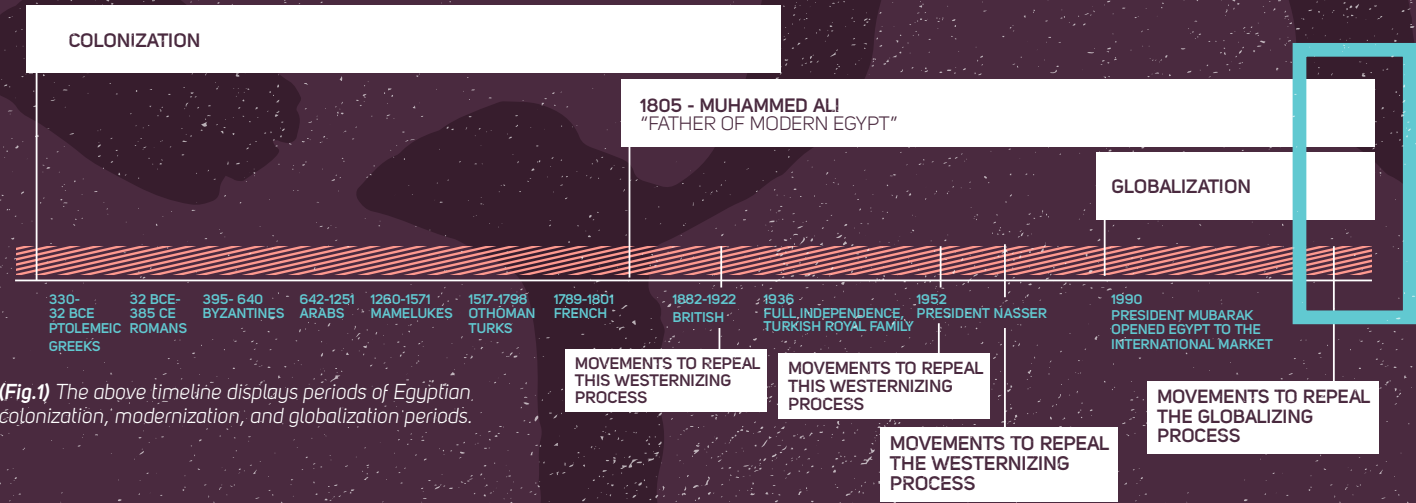
Most historians agree that Egypt was conquered and occupied by many different empires, throughout history. Naturally, these periods of colonization impacted every aspect of Egyptian society, gradually shaping the development of Egyptian identity and culture. One of the most influential events in Egyptian history, however, occurred one year after the country had fallen to French occupation (a direct result of Napoleon Bonaparte's 1798 expedition to the Orient), was the unexpected discovery of, what became known as, the Rosetta Stone. What researchers quickly realized about this ancient tablet of unknown origin, was that, due to noted similarities between the Greek letters and the Egyptian hieroglyphic and demotic scripts carved into it, scholars were able to decipher the stone, gaining, for the first time, an understanding of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic script.<sup>1</sup>

Since the beginning of the 1900s, in the era of Muhammad Ali Pasha, European systems and techniques were imported into different aspects of Egyptian society, such as the fields of medicine, agriculture, and industry. Egyptian journalist and novelist, Amin Maalouf, highlighted this as when Western influence began using their western systems and strategies to make its mark on Egypt, and on the rest of the world.<sup>2</sup> At that time, Egyptians began exploring and traveling abroad, learning new sciences, and other techniques. Eventually, the explorers and researchers returned to their country, bringing with them foreign concepts and advanced technologies; opening the door for westernization to influence the Egyptian context.

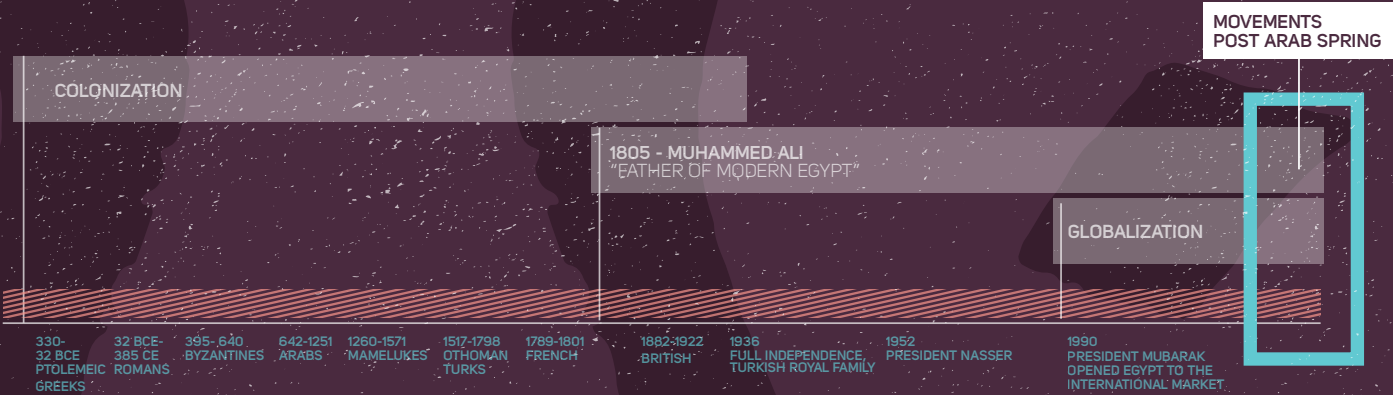
In response, Egyptians generated the process of liberalization in their art, music and poetry to reject those westernized systems, with outcomes reflecting elements from their Egyptian heritage. However, in some areas of Egypt, the people both celebrated and embedded those western systems into their daily lives and activities. Over time, this liberation process slowly became a part of the national identity, and, accordingly, repeated itself whenever Egyptians faced the possibility of substantial change, either politically or socially. In the book, *"Walls of Freedom,"* author Basma Hamdy highlights that, "Neo-Pharaonism," for example, was the 1919 cultural movement that occurred as a response to British rule in Egypt, during that time. The movement involved Egyptian artists and writers, using the process of liberalization in their art, in an attempt to return to an Ancient Egyptian style. During the 1950s, another cultural movement, originated by artists calling themselves "folk realists," again, rejected the western look and feel.<sup>3</sup> After the war with Israel, in 1973, another cultural movement, once again, demonstrated the depths of Egyptian pride. (See Fig. 1) During the last few decades, Egyptians' identity had to be repeatedly appropriated by themselves, or the outsider's influences, in order to survive the numerous, and rapid political, social, cultural and economic changes.

Despite the frequent cultural appropriating occurrences in their society, Egyptians were keenly aware that their foreign rulers were, after all, different; most Egyptians, eventually, adopted the cultural ways of their rulers, primarily, just to get ahead in life and please the rulers. Certainly, a significant part from each of the ruling empires' culture still lives in Egypt. Even further, to this day, there is a common Egyptian saying: "تقليد الغلبة", which loosely translated means, "Imitate or mimic the non-Egyptians in power" or to "Ape the foreigners actions."

At the beginning of the 1990s, during the era of President Hosni Mubarak, Egypt was first introduced to the open global market,



(Fig.1) The above timeline displays periods of Egyptian colonization, modernization, and globalization periods.



(Fig.2) A timeline shows my investigation of the hacking process to globalization in Egypt.

because of this, even those countries that never occupied, or ruled over Egypt, eventually gained influence. For instance, due to those globalized cultural influences, the United States of America spread their cultural system, into that of Egyptian society, by way of economic trading, as well as exchanges in the entertainment, technological, and political aspects. In fact, as noted Egyptian economist, Galal Amin, argues, globalization as a process could affect and shape a country's life, both economically and socially, due to the actions that transpire in the international and local business sectors, not to the country itself, which exposes the power that globalization has on nations.<sup>4</sup> Currently, in Egypt, there is the governmental or public sector, built in the 1900s, and then, there is the private sector, opened to the globalized international markets since the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> These two systems demonstrate the split that is happening within the social, economical and political condition, in Egypt, right now.

Since the Egyptian Revolution, in 2011 (See Fig.2), the country has been host to a number of different internal cultural movements, each serving to reject the current system(s), while celebrating national identity and culture. As a witness of the aforementioned revolution, I observed the East-West intermix of underground creative cultural forces, and have clearly seen the interplay between local to global, and vice versa. Besides, given that the revolution took place in the post-internet world, I bore witness to a new, and massive shift in how Egyptians approached it, as compared to how they did so in the past. In that, they used modern, globalized tools, such as, a variety of social media platforms, in order to create social arenas for discussing local political issues. For instance, the social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook, were just one of the venues in which the Egyptian revolutionaries (primarily comprised of youths) expressed themselves, organized protests, and rallied people to participate. While, others at that time – graffiti artists, underground bands, spoken word artists, poets, and comedians, coming to the foreground to voice their political views – were used to visualize and archive culture. Although those movements utilized a globalized/foreign-system as a method to express the situation, its delivery remained completely Egyptian. Based on my observations, the participants applied the commonly understood Egyptian wit, and its sense of irony (or sarcasm), in their social media posts, and, in doing so, the messages were successfully directed at and understood by their intended audience – fellow Egyptians. As such, most social media platforms were flooded daily with Egyptianized memes and pertinent news, which effectively altered the way I received and understood information online.

This thesis observes how Egyptian culture could evolve, due to globalized influences and systems affecting every sector; particularly, in the visual and linguistic communication sectors. The research will help illustrate the current evolutionary circumstances impacting Egyptian identity, as well as

identifying, and evaluating, the various elements that allowed the evolution to occur, in the first place. In his four part video series, "Everything is a Remix," Kirby Ferguson, a filmmaker and a writer discusses the concept of originality, and, essentially, explains how everything is, either, inspired, copied, or morphed from something else. He argues, that, "This is social evolution. Copy, transform and combine. It's who we are, it's how we live, and of course, it's how we create. Our new ideas evolve from the old ones."<sup>6</sup> Evolving the new from the old is not only applicable to ideas; in fact, throughout history, cultures and identities were similarly reshaped and morphed, based on the circumstances and conditions present, during their development. Accordingly, it is subjective to first identify what is globalized, in a specific culture, and then, evaluate, how that culture in turn impacted the globalized culture. Currently, the contemporary cultural movements happening within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, further encompasses the overall shifts and patterns, happening outside of it. And, in doing so, it evaluates how those shifts affect people's behavior and, also, measures how people respond to them. On a personal level, being a part of those cultural movements, as a designer, allows me to observe better both my identity, and my culture, enabling me to, effectively, choose whether to criticize, or to celebrate, those shifts.

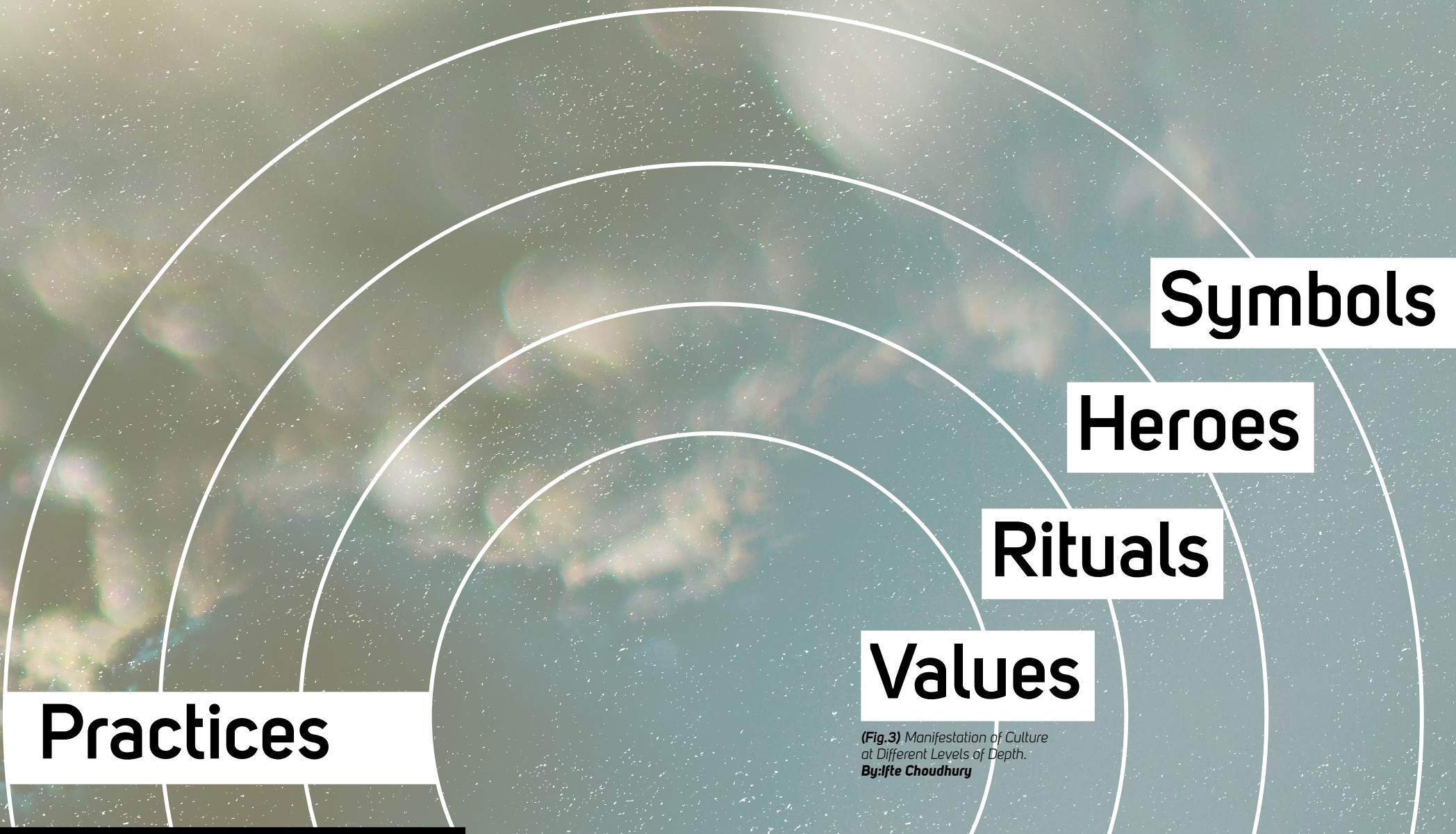
Delimitations:

For me, Egypt presents an interesting case study, it being a clear representative of a culture that has continually evolved and shifted, in response to a variety of outside influences, throughout history. Given that the majority of my undergrad education was based in Qatar, I observed my homeland, Egypt, from an outsider perspective, and this captivated me to study the cultural movements narrating political and social events in Egypt. During the recent revolution of 2011, known collectively as The Arab Spring; myself, and others from my generation, witnessed and experienced, those cultural, political, economical, and sociological shifts. As a result, this research will encapsulate a number of critiques and challenges, each of which carries with. It will force me question the period I have witnessed and certainly, how it affected me. Post-Arab Spring Egyptians developed and practiced cultural hacking both as a methodology and a process, using Egypt's current cultural tools. The investigation will examine these methodologies and processes, and it will investigate how they impacted the globalized systems, currently affecting Egyptian culture, identity, and/or society.

Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> "The Rosetta Stone," Linda Hall Library, n.d., [http://napoleon.lindahall.org/rosetta\\_stone.shtml](http://napoleon.lindahall.org/rosetta_stone.shtml).
- <sup>2</sup> Jonathan Lear, "The Enemy of My Enemy," *The New York Times*, November 25, 2001, sec. Books, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/25/books/the-enemy-of-my-enemy.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> Basma Hamdy and Don Karl Aka Stone, *Walls of Freedom* (from here to fame, 2014), 146, <http://wallsoffreedom.com/>.
- <sup>4</sup> Galal Amin, "Globalization, Consumption Patterns and Human Development in Egypt," n.d., 21, <http://www.erf.org.eg/CMS/uploads/pdf/9929.pdf>.
- <sup>5</sup> "Globalization and Society in Egypt - Shaping the Humanities," December 30, 2013, <http://blog.goethe.de/humanities/archives/40-Globalization-and-Society-in-Egypt.html>.
- <sup>6</sup> Kirby Ferguson, "Everything Is a Remix," *Everything Is a Remix*, accessed November 17, 2015, <http://everythingisaremix.info/>.





(Fig.3) Manifestation of Culture at Different Levels of Depth.  
By:Ifte Choudhury

## A. The self and culture

Amidst the recently occurring monumental shifts in the Egyptian culture and society, how modern Egyptians identify themselves? Typically, I classify myself as a young Muslim Egyptian woman, however, due to a continuous flow of outside influences, from the subtle, cleverly disguised remnants of colonization, westernization and globalization impacting every aspect of my life, I am left feeling conflicted and often wonder about my identity. In her recent article “Locating the Self between National and Global”, researcher Manisha Gangahar, states that it is only through interaction with *the other*, the one is able to properly define one’s *self*-Identity.<sup>1</sup> What Gangahar means, by that claim, is that without having people around us for us to differentiate *from*, we cannot actually identify *ourselves*, or define *who we are*. In fact, the more interactions, and conversational exchange occurrences, between *the others* and *the self*, the more “we” (as in, individual human beings) construct and develop, a better understanding and identifying of our *self* and with *others*. Furthermore, Gangahar adds that every person must also properly identify, and define the large overall “circle” that envelops each of us, which by definition serves to differentiate and encompass our “collective identity,”<sup>2</sup> but, also, our “national identity.” This, according to Gangahar, is an all-important step, in the comprehensive identification process and, as such, its necessity and inclusion is absolutely paramount. Even further, each “identity” plays an important role in how we classify others (people), according to their location, status, gender, age, and race.

To this end, I found a solid correlation to what Gangahar claims, and my own curiosities and limited understanding of how the identification process originates. Accordingly, my self-identity is best illustrated, as a “map” comprised of my numerous “circles of influence”. Although each one is different, they continuously intermix, combine, separate, and overlap each other. A few examples of the circles I identify with include: Arabic, Islamic, African, Ancient Egyptian, female/womanhood, and the intellectual. Naturally, as each individual is unique, each circle could potentially become the main circle in his or her personal hierarchy, which encapsulate all other supporting circles within/under it and vice versa. For instance, if an Egyptian Muslim female experienced a situation regarding her feminism, the “female/womanhood circle” might become dominant, in her hierarchy, calling for the rest of her remaining circles to shift, in support of that central one. When the other circles experience a similar overlap in

beliefs or social activities, complementary to your own, the hierarchical shifting process, mentioned above, shapes the national identity for a specific nation in a particular time and place. Professor Ifte Choudhury defined the term “Culture” being the overall comprehensive system, encompassing identity, and the deepest level of “culture” depicting manifestations of values, rituals, traditions, and dominant symbols.(See Fig. 3)

Due to a number of changeable circumstances, cultures in the contemporary world are merging as a result of those changes. Cultures in a broad sense undergo a metamorphosis due to evolution that happen to the identities within. This process of evolving was the primary focus in “*Identity Crisis*”<sup>3</sup>, in which noted scholar Mervyn F. Bendle provides an in-depth analysis of this process. Also, it discusses its cultural and societal impact. The debate of the existence of an identity crisis exists or not, is endless. I have witnessed both, the advantages, and disadvantages of this process. Based on the recent research of sociology professor Dr. Ludger Pries, in which he argues that, collectively, nations use what he calls, “*processing over time*”<sup>4</sup> methodologies, in order to develop and change their identities. Since each national culture adapts differently to the residual effects from the globalization process; naturally, results may vary depending on different social, political, economic, and cultural factors. Dr. Pries discusses that nations could exchange their cultures, or be multicultural nations, due to the accessibility to the globalized systems. But at the same time hold on to the traditions and the national identities, such as Japan.<sup>5</sup>

## B- Globalization as an action

Initially, the scope of globalization was typically limited and described solely as an economic process. Yet, individuals branched out gradually to include the importation of globalized systems and their subsequent adaptation to culture. Interestingly, this was often done without knowing the meaning behind those systems, or, even, consideration of whether they fit the culture, or not.<sup>6</sup> However, not everyone agrees with that argument, especially those belonging to an older generation, as they have become too accustomed to applying specific meaning systems in relation to the commonly understood context, for which they have always belonged. For these individuals, culture is a fixed thing and therefore, it should not be changed easily.<sup>7</sup> Understandably, as shown by the current state of affairs in the interconnected, post-globalized world of today this is not the case. Additionally, due to the recent increase in accessibility and availability of new

information and systems all over the world, people are continually reconstructing the meaning of culture. This very cause correlation has prompted at least, one researcher Stefan B. Kirmse to take notice. In order to gain a better understanding of globalization and its consequences, Kirmse was interested in studying residual effects of the process and investigating ways that they could either impact or influence a population. In his 2010 study, Kirmse observed young Muslims in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia, during which he noticed that the students related more closely to heroes portrayed in the western cinema, Russian TV, and Bollywood cinema. Kirmse surmised that the reason behind the phenomena was that everything presented on those programs had pre-loaded linguistic translations that he believes, essentially, disconnected between the audience members and their origins.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, Kirmse’s research highlights the importance of globalization, focusing, primarily, on how it effectively reshapes the behavior of students, especially in religious learning environments.<sup>9</sup> He claims that, in the past, students used to download *hadiths* [the canonized words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him)], even when they had limited access to the Internet. In his study, however, Kirmse explains that, whenever young people choose their own styles and identities, they tend to choose with a steadily increasing frequency, according to their cultural circles.<sup>10</sup>

For myself, my education was taught in English in Egypt from kindergarten and all the way to the graduate level. My English education was a by-product of British imperialization in Egypt, Britain being the last occupying force to rule over Egypt. For an imperializing force, whenever they occupy a new land, one of their first tasks is to take away that land’s native language. Egypt was no exception in this regard, in fact, the remnants of that process is still being felt in the country today. Education in Egyptian society became an indication of status. As the author, Galal Amin, explains, “The national language comes gradually to be looked down upon.”<sup>11</sup> Although I was a part of this “brainwashing” process, my English education allows me to use different online venues. Furthermore, while, in many ways, I conceive this ability to be, primarily, a beneficial one for me, however, it also opens me up to adapt, criticize and analyze the outside influences and systems, to evolve with my self, the collective and national identity. Both of which, undoubtedly, has had an effect on me, and each has proven to shape my self-identity, through different time periods, and across cultures.



**GLOBALIZATION**  
OUTSIDE INFLUENCES AND SYSTEMS

ACTION ►

**THE CULTURE**

◀ REACTION

**CULTURE HACKING**  
INSIDE INFLUENCES AND SYSTEMS

(Fig.4) Diagram that represents the globalized systems, the culture and the process culture hacking

اختراق الثقافة

## C- Hacking as a reaction

Our daily activities in Egypt were appropriated, due to globalization and because this process is a relatively subtle one, it slowly became a part of our identities and, as a result, it upgraded all of our pre-conceived notions and concepts of "culture," and molded it into something else, entirely. Eventually, individual cultures soon began borrowing from one another and exchanging, or influencing other cultures, which, in turn, bled over into individual self-identities adapting to those globalized elements, and integrating them to be a part of their own self-identity. In order to identify "hacking" as an action, first, the term "hacker" needs to be defined as a person. In a recent article, Maya Zuckerman states, that, "To be a hacker of any kind is to always seek change whether it be perceived as either positive, negative or both."<sup>12</sup> She goes on to discuss how the "hacker culture" developed its own characteristics and mindset; pushing forth its own group of likeminded people to challenge an existing system, or the imported globalized system. Furthermore, hackers must continually find new and clever ways to criticize, or completely reject those systems, utilizing anything to further their cause, from sending simple messages of criticism, or finding irony in the natural settings of specific cultures. (See Fig.4) For instance, Hans Haacke had a critical statement to the value of artwork in the market. Haacke used Seurat's painting "Les Poseuses", as a case study, by displaying the painting and next to it, the timeline of ownership and changing its value. Haacke critiqued

the existing financial and institutional systems, which the artwork belongs to<sup>13</sup>. The hacker is attracted to the process, the results and impacts, to be able to make a social commentary on specific events or happenings.

Over time, the hacking culture became more widely recognized in society, again, due to the globalized exchange that happens between individuals in different cultures. And, so, according to Irvine, through the use of new forms of digital media, building a visual language, suddenly, became easier as did educating others about foreign cultures, or introducing innovative concepts and ideas into society. All became possible, simply by adapting and utilizing visual culture.<sup>1</sup> But first, in order to do all that, it is necessary to acknowledge the "hacking culture" as a useful methodology for generating change; especially since this process, effectively, challenges the culture, from a design perspective, and changes its original outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

To that end, "Appropriation, transcription, manipulation and revaluation are used to alter everyday situations, objects, rules or routines."<sup>15</sup> These four processes were first introduced to facilitate the hacking process, within any culture. The intent of this research is to challenge existing globalized norms by "hacking" specific contexts. The investigation will examine and document cultural intersections and the impacts of globalization on individual culture(s) using self-generated tools and observational methodologies.

## Notes:

- 1 Manisha Gangahar, "Locating the Self between National and Global," *AI & SOCIETY* 30, no. 2 (July 24, 2013): 167–72, doi:10.1007/s00146-013-0497-4.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Mervyn F. Bendle, "The Crisis of 'Identity' in High Modernity," *British Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 1 (March 2002): 1–18, doi:10.1080/00071310120109302.
- 4 Ludger Pries, "Ambiguities of Global and Transnational Collective Identities," *Global Networks* 13, no. 1 (January 2013): 22–40, doi:10.1111/j.1471-0374.2012.00368.x.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Anna Lucille Boozer, "Globalizing Mediterranean Identities: The Overlapping Spheres of Egyptian, Greek and Roman Worlds at Trimithis," *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 25, no. 2 (December 2012): 220, doi:10.1558/jmea.v25i2.219.
- 7 Gangahar, "Locating the Self between National and Global," 169.
- 8 Stefan B. Kirmse, "In the Marketplace for Styles and Identities: Globalization and Youth Culture in Southern Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 4 (December 2010): 392, doi:10.1080/02634937.2010.537138.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., 390.
- 11 Galal Amin, "Globalization, Consumption Patterns and Human Development in Egypt," n.d., 21, <http://www.erf.org.eg/CMS/uploads/pdf/9929.pdf>.
- 12 Maya Zuckerman, "Culture Hacking 101," *The Huffington Post*, September 3, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/maya-zuckerman/culture-hacking-101\\_b\\_5753660.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/maya-zuckerman/culture-hacking-101_b_5753660.html).
- 13 "Hans Haacke - Seurat's 'Les Poseuses' (Small Version), 1888-1975," accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/seurats-poseuses-small-version-1888-1975>.
- 14 Martin Irvine, "Intro to Visual Culture," 2011 2004, <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/visualarts/Intro-VisualCulture.html>.
- 15 Otto Von Busch and Karl Palmas, "Abstract Hacktivism, the Making of a Hacker Culture," 2006, <http://www.isk-gbg.org/99our68/AbstractHacktivism.pdf>.
- 16 "Hacking The City Book Publication| Digital Art, Design and Culture," *Digicult | Digital Art, Design and Culture*, accessed October 2, 2015, <http://www.digicult.it/news/hacking-the-city-book-publication/>.



International precedents:

Due to the increasing exchange of ideas through globalization and technology, the idea of 'hacking culture' has become a widely accepted practice. Globalization frequently introduces new systems into different cultural contexts, forcing individuals to adapt to unfamiliar processes. While globalization affects all of society, each individual reacts to the process differently. Studies show that when an unfamiliar act happens to a group of individuals, the group generally calls into question the act, but with different individualized results. Groups in this situation typically separate into two divisions: those with (i.e., in support of) the unfamiliar act and those against (i.e., unsupportive of) it. "Hacking methods" are developed by artists, designers, researchers and engineers based on a their reaction to changes within their cultural context, including values, rituals, traditions, and dominant symbols. Hackers generally utilize familiar concepts to help adapt to foreign concepts and integrate new systems into daily life. Individual "hacks" can arise in a private space, in a public space, or in a digital space.

Dead drops: Making the unfamiliar, familiar

A recent article published in The Guardian titled, "Dead Drops: What to do if you see a USB stick sticking out of a wall,"<sup>1</sup> describes a 2010 art project by the Berlin-based media artist Aram Bartholl. According to the article, Bartholl's asynchronous "Dead Drop" project applied a hacking method to artistically express his adaptation of a familiar concept onto an unfamiliar system. By using cement and paint, Bartholl implanted numerous USB flash drives into a variety of publically accessible physical spaces, like the exterior wall of a public building or on a random bit of fencing (See Fig.1&2).

In the beginning, Bartholl's USB drives contained nothing except a file describing the project. But, over time, after inserting one of the drives into their laptop, willing participants could choose between either downloading an anonymously shared file from the drive or uploading something new of their own.<sup>2</sup> As the number of project participants grew, however, so did the need to properly track and analyze project data. Accordingly, project developers created a comprehensive, user-friendly website, which utilizes a variety of real-time maps and charts to visually represent the wide-range of statistical data - including participatory fluctuation and regional adaptation. In fact, any interested participant can still become a part of the project's documentation process, simply by going to the website and filling out an online form. (See Fig.3)

Bartholl's art project asked participants to anonymously share all types of digital media files with random strangers via the digital tool of their choice. Due to the evolutionary nature inherent to the "Dead Drop" project, especially as it pertains to the transference of digital content between one person and another, the concepts of "interactivity" and "information sharing" were redefined. As author Maria Konnikova states, it is the 'anonymity' element of the project that encourages people to participate. Because their individual identities remain hidden, people are more open to becoming part of a collective and communal identity.<sup>3</sup>



Submit a Dead Drop

General

Drop-Names:

Drop-Size:  (1.e. 2 GB) Drop-Type:

Location

Country:  (please select your country)

State:  Latitude:

City:  Longitude:

Zip Code:

Street Address:

If no coordinates set the address will be used to set the position of the dead drop.

Description

Take three good pictures! JPG max file size 1 MB !!! The pictures should be at least 3000x3000. At drop-view they will be cropped to square.

Overview

Medium distance

Closeup

Pictures:

No file chosen  No file chosen  No file chosen

About:

additional info:

- your story!
- how to find the Dead Drop
- details/info on the neighborhood,
- associated shop/institution
- special features/requirements
- credits/author

Administration

☐ Create user account. (In the near future Login data to edit the drop will be sent to your email.)

Your Email:

Email-address will never be sold, shared, posted publicly, or otherwise misused.

Screenname:

(\* marked fields required)

(Fig.1,2&3) Dead Drops' documentation process and spots to place the USB flash drives

Qalb: Bridging culture through technology

Another illustrative example of conceptualized hacking in existing systems is a project called "Qalb." Qalb, when translated from Arabic into English, means "heart." When referencing computer-coding languages, ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) is the one most commonly used. However, the English-based structure of ASCII was limited to those who could read and write the language. Frustrated by the limiting factors of ASCII, Ramsey Nasser, an accomplished computer scientist and noted game designer developed Qalb during his research fellowship at Eyebeam, a non-profit art and technology research organization. A project of self-expression, Nasser developed Qalb in response to the marginalization created by the English-language gap in technology.<sup>4</sup> He identified the need to improve ASCII and wanted to make the technology user-friendlier to a wider group of people. Consequently, Nasser developed an Arabic-based coding language for computational and digital programming (See Fig.4). Due to the interconnectedness of the Arabic lettering system, Nasser's coding script has a very unique visual structure. The innate complexities within Arabic script necessitate the inclusion of the Kashida, which elongates individual Arabic characters and allows for properly aligned lines of code (See Fig.5). By embedding a different system (Qalb) into an already familiar and accepted one (ASCII), the Qalb project challenges traditional systems. The use of this familiar language enables programmers to code JavaScript in Arabic, instead of forcing them to use a foreign ASCII code.<sup>5</sup> Nasser's Qalb project acts as a bridge between the two cultures, and opens them both to a wider, more inclusive audience.

(Fig.4&5) Nasser's Arabic-based coding language outcomes

Free Speech: Private versus public

Another example of hacking a familiarized system to produce an evolutionary outcome is in the 2012 art video project called, "Free Speech," by American artist Evan Roth.<sup>6</sup> In the video, Roth drove around the city streets of Vienna, and used loudspeakers installed on the roof of his vehicle to loudly broadcast private phone calls around the public spaces (See Fig. 6). In doing so, Roth challenged a traditional social system that, up to that point, had always maintained two separate spheres: private and public. Roth's project enabled any street pedestrian to easily become a part of the public experience simply by dialing the phone number displayed on the vehicle from their personal device. By merging the boundaries of both social systems, the collective public could hear individual voices and private conversations.

The uniqueness of the "Free Speech" approach, combined with its synchronous nature, engaged the audience and encouraged people to participate (See Fig. 7&8). With the audience attention focused on the van, and not on the person speaking, anonymity encouraged people to participate. As a result, project participants were empowered to speak more freely, as if they were on a private call to a friend. Intended as a social commentary, Roth's conceptual integration of the two social spheres challenged and criticized traditional social norms. The project highlighted distinctive behavioral changes on an individual and communal level by blurring the division between private and public.

(Fig. 6,7&8) Still, Pedestrians interacting with the van on the streets in Vienna, 2012

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- 2 Aram, "Deaddrops," Dead Drops, November 1, 2010, <https://deaddrops.com/about/deaddrops-2/>.
- 3 Maria Konnikova, "The Psychology of Online Comments," The New Yorker, October 23, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-psychology-of-online-comments>.
- 4 Ramsey Nasser, "Ramsey Nasser — قلب," Ramsey Nasser, 2013, <http://nas.sr/%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A8/>.
- 5 "قلب: لغة برمجة | Eyebeam.org," accessed March 24, 2016, <http://eyebeam.org/projects/%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A8-%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A9%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A9>.
- 6 Evan Roth, "Free Speech," Evan Roth, 2012, <http://www.evan-roth.com/work/free-speech/>.

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Fig. 1: Bartholl, Aram. "Dead Drops" - NYC." Flickr - Photo Sharing!. Accessed April 15, 2016. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bartholl/5126775626/>.

Fig.2: Aram Bartholl, "Dead Drops" - NYC," Flickr - Photo Sharing!, accessed April 15, 2016, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bartholl/5126739968/>.

Fig. 3:"Database, Map & Submit." Dead Drops, November 1, 2010. <https://deaddrops.com/dead-drops/db-map/>.

Fig.4: "Artist's Notebook: Ramsey Nasser." ANIMAL, May 5, 2014. <http://animalnewyork.com/2014/artist-notebook-ramsey-nasser/>.

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Fig. 6: Roth, Evan. "Free Speech." Evan Roth, 2012. <http://www.evan-roth.com/work/free-speech/>.

Fig.7: Still, Roth, Evan. Free Speech on Vimeo. Accessed February 10, 2016. <https://vimeo.com/50162010>.

Fig.8: Still, Roth, Evan. Free Speech on Vimeo. Accessed February 10, 2016. <https://vimeo.com/50162010>.



## National precedents:

In today's Post-Arab Spring Egypt, many sectors began to use globalized systems and were influenced in different ways. Globalization enabled the exchange, and spread, of information on a mass scale. In reaction to this spread of ideas and information, individuals began to use local elements to comment on globalization in their creative practice through local references, language, and visual culture (See Fig. 9).



### References:

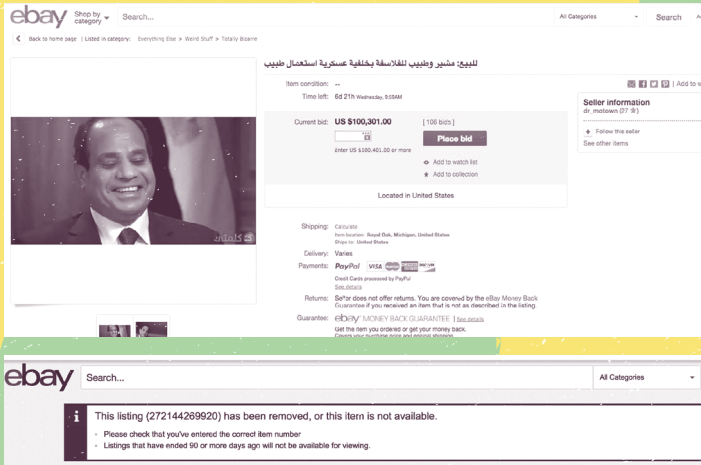
Many Egyptians use their sense of humor and wit to comment on daily social or political activities. The Internet provides a medium for them to connect virtually and has become an accessible way to inform others about social and political issues. Sean Rintel, an academic at the University of Queensland, researches the growing online creative 'comment' culture.<sup>7</sup> Using commentary tools, this culture generates memes to imitate, contextualize, and mash up the information they receive. Rintel explains that there are three types of memes: intertextuality, indexicality and templatability. An intertextuality meme is one that references another meme. Indexicality memes, on the other hand, applies replicated images into different situations and contexts. A templatability meme utilizes different visual representations as a way of recycling pre-existing content structures.<sup>8</sup>

A recent example of using templatability was Safi ElDin Abd ElRashid, an Egyptian artist who created a set of Emojis about the Egyptian President Abd ElFatah El-Sisi. Each Emoji represented a specific event or part of El-Sisi's speeches, including a hashtag beneath each Emoji in Arabic and English to link the content to the visual representation. Abd ElRashid used emojis as international communication tools, commenting on national topics using hashtag such as *#Egypt\_is\_happy* and *#This\_is\_not\_right*. (See Fig. 10) Rintel states that memes can be part of social change and this is embodied in the work of Abd ElRashid. The Egyptian cultural system struggled to accept the reaction generated by Abd ElRashid with the viral image immediately deleted after it was posted online<sup>9</sup>.



(Fig. 10) ElSisi Emojis by Safi El Din Abd El Rashid

*#President\_for\_sale* was an online visual commentary made using templatability where wit as a tool to comment on a political event. In this case, the hashtag was generated in reaction to a comment by Egyptian President Abd ElFatah El-Sisi when he stated in a recent speech that he would "sell himself," if it could help improve the Egyptian economy. Wit was employed when an individual listed the President "for sale" on eBay, with a *current bid*; defining the president as *slightly used*<sup>10</sup> (See Fig. 11). Again, the hack was removed as soon as the listing went viral. However, the commentary remained effective because it used familiar context and localized references within an international arena (eBay), to make a powerful statement about culture (See Fig. 12).



(Fig. 11&12) The listing on eBay for the Egyptian President and after removing the listing



(Fig. 13&14) Digital Artwork by Nermine Hamam, Upekkha, 2011

### Mixed media art:

Created in 2011 as a work of visual commentary, Nermine Hamam's piece, "Upekkha," is yet another example in which the artist utilized online content to produce a work of art.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, in creating "Upekkha," Hamam an Egyptian artist amassed an extensive collection of viral photographs from various social media outlets, and only used the images she felt best captured, or represented, the "essence" of the Egyptian revolution, at that moment in time. Throughout the revolution, Hamam amongst others became cautious of the Egyptian army, frequently questioning its motives and actions. At the beginning of the revolution, the people were told the military would side with the protestors, but this did not end up being the case. This betrayal impacted the Egyptian people profoundly, including Hamam and her artwork.

"Upekkha," for example, was created in response to this. First, Hamam conceptualized her most idealistic outcome of the revolution and used it as the background for the visual treatment. Hamam then applied differently colored landscapes to the work, as a way to create a sense of contradiction. The work's bright and colorful backgrounds provide an interesting juxtaposition to the serious nature and visual representations of reality and power, as displayed in the behavior and stature of the military men in the foreground. By combining visual language with images of familiar events, not only does Hamam's composition capture a specific moment in time, but also one that is easily recognizable by Egyptian people. Furthermore, the piece acts as a bridge between cultures and a link to the political situation in Egypt because of the international references in the background (See Fig. 13&14).

### Going viral:



(Fig.15,16&17) Stills from different online shows, satirists and music bands

Both during, and after, the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, Egyptians used different globalized online platforms, such as YouTube, as their preferred method of delivery for disseminating their various audio-visual content to their audience. Much of the content were in direct response to political or social events, occurring around the country, at that time. Many artists rose in popularity through these venues, and have since become well known, Bassem Yousef, Kairokee, Abba Fahita, Almwaten Elmasry, Islam Hossam and Abdoulrahman ihab Ibrahim. (See Fig. 15,16&17) At the beginning, all used low-budget equipment to create their videos. Luckily, this method produced unexpected results, in that; it formed a lasting connection to their viewership, because the audience felt they were truly representing the people. Although there were numerous attempts made by the Egyptian regime to block them, those attempts, remarkably, backfired instead, due to the interconnectedness of the people to the artists. As Jon Stewart stated on Bassem Yousef's show, that, "If your regime can't handle a joke, you don't have a regime."<sup>12</sup> Which had changed peoples' perception of the regime.

One popular channel, in particular, featured an anonymously created satirical puppet show, called Abba Fahita, and, through it, managed to generate a debate amongst the Egyptian people. What drew many Egyptians to follow or subscribe to Abba Fahita's channel was in the way it critiqued current events, by

depicting mimicked mannerisms of many typical women in Egyptian society. It accomplished this feat, in a light-hearted, and satirical manner. I was first introduced to her videos in 2010, before the revolution began, but due to its immense popularity in Egyptian society, many of the characters' videos have gone viral, since then.

The puppet, *Abba Fahita*, is a caricaturized imitation of a middle-aged Egyptian widow, and is the mother of two children: a girl and a boy. The setting, in all her videos, is always at *Abba Fahita's* house, with much of the premise revolving around the character talking on the phone, to her friend, about a variety of topics, such as food recipes, hair salons, or local gossip. After the revolution, however, a video was posted, highlighting how she was stuck at home, due to the recently implemented social curfew, set by the regime. Despite this, her popularity continued to grow and before long, Egyptian audiences began seeing *Abba Fahita* on TV and commercials.



(Fig.18&19) A still, Abba Fahita in Vodafone's TV Commercial

After a particularly popular Vodafone TV commercial run, in 2013, (See Fig. 18&19) *Abba Fahita* was accused of sending secretly coded messages to members of the Muslim Brotherhood, and that Vodafone was using her popularity to further various interests of the Muslim Brotherhood. In response to these unfounded allegations and rumors, many political and social activists, as well as numerous popular social media users, proceeded to make fun of those accusers, since that time; claiming that, because they could not solve any real issues, they chose, instead, they used the puppet as a scapegoat! Political analyst Ziad Akl of Al-Ahram Center for Strategic Studies stated that, "*Sarcasm*, however, is giving way to alarm as fears grow over the ominous nature of such a step by the authorities."<sup>13</sup>

Through the utilization of a simple template, the anonymous creators of *Abba Fahita*, effectively, raised social awareness, generated political discussion amongst the Egyptian people and managed to attract international media coverage, in the process. Besides, the creator of the popular puppet must have taken special care to keep his/her identity anonymous, because, surprisingly, it continues to remains so, even to this day. Additionally, I firmly believe this puppet show, to be a wholly unique case. Because, in keeping the creator's identity anonymous, the "spotlight" was, then, forced to focus on the puppet, itself, which, allowed its creator, the complete freedom, to communicate with his/her audience, directly, and get his/her messages across, as intended.

## Notes:

- 7 Sean Rintel, "Explainer: What Are Memes?," The Conversation, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://theconversation.com/explainer-what-are-memes-20789>.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 "Sisi Emojis Go Viral," Cairo Scene, accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/Buzz/Sisi-Emojis-Go-Viral>.
- 10 "Egypt's Sisi 'Put up for Sale' on eBay after Speech," accessed March 24, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/02/egypt-sisi-mocked-offering-sell-160225045549263.html>.
- 11 Nermine Hammam, "Upekkha," Nermine Hammam, 2011, <http://www.nerminehammam.com/upekkha.html>.
- 12 Juan Cole, "Jon Stewart with Bassem Youssef in Cairo," Informed Comment, accessed February 11, 2016, <http://www.juancole.com/2013/06/stewart-youssef-handle.html>.
- 13 "The Fahita Affair: Egyptian Puppetry and Terrorism," accessed November 3, 2015, <http://ara.tv/ndbc9>.

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- Fig.10:** "Sisi Emojis Go Viral." Cairo Scene. Accessed March 24, 2016. <http://www.cairoscene.com/Buzz/Sisi-Emojis-Go-Viral>.
- Fig.11:** Izadi, Elahe. "Someone Listed Egypt's President for Sale on eBay. Condition: 'Slightly Used.'" The Washington Post, February 25, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/02/25/someone-listed-egypts-president-for-sale-on-ebay-condition-slightly-used/>.
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- Fig.15:** Still, Albernage. "Jon Stewart with Bassem Youssef in Egypt." Albernage. Egypt: Youtube, July 21, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kE02Rd3sJbA>.
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- Fig.17:** Still, Kairokee. "أنا عارفة - Kairokee - Akher Oghnaya." Music video, March 12, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZu2euuj2GE>.
- Fig.18&19:** Stills, Vodafone Egypt. "أبلة فاهيتا وشريحة المرحوم." Abba Fahita w share7et elmar7oom. Youtube video. Egypt, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQm694L7ByY>.



## Investigations:

By positioning myself as a hacker, I am of the mindset in which I constantly react to all the different things I see, hear, and experience in my everyday life, within my local context. Ever since I began my journey in the VCUQ MFA program, just two years ago, my thesis topic has been in a constant state of flux. Although each investigation presents different challenges, they all follow a similar path from start to finish. Each investigation requires me to observe my surrounding culture, identify behavioral patterns, analyze gathered information, understand core concepts, determine problematic areas, and, finally, develop outcomes that illustrate the underlying elements of design thinking.

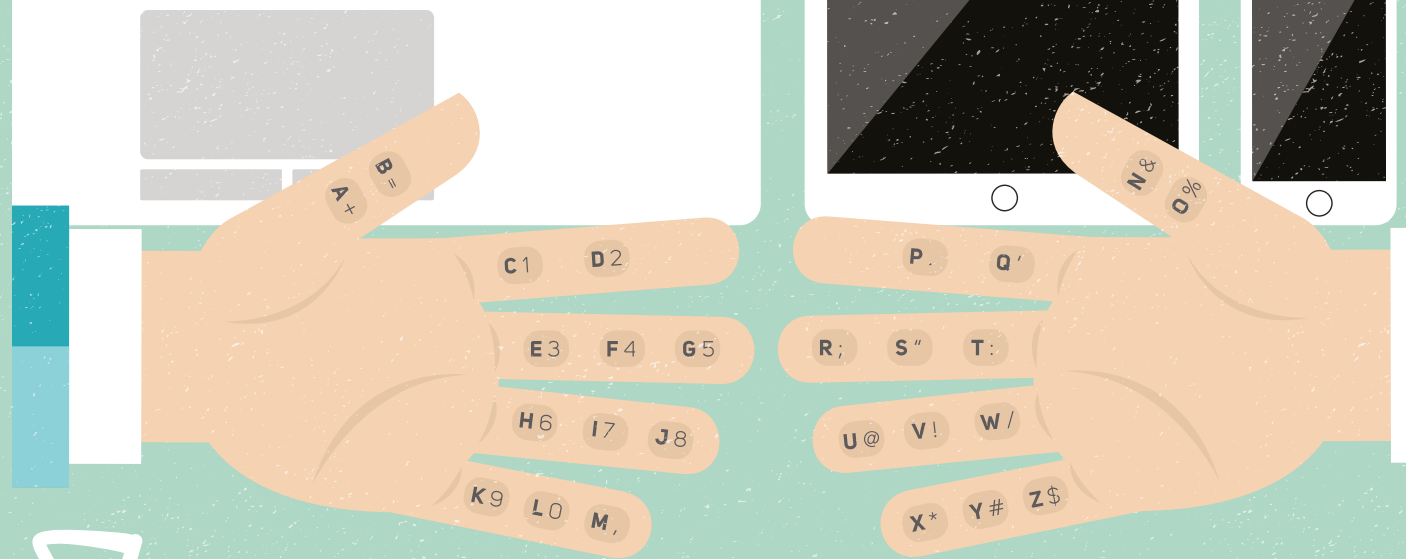
### Investigation 1: 3arabizi keyboard

The vast difference between the Arabic lettering system and that of the English alphabet is one of the primary reasons Arabs struggle to communicate using digital tools. With many of today's digital devices structured for an English-based alphabetical keyboard, there is a struggle to use the tools for messaging or communication.<sup>1</sup> In the early development of digital tools for communication, text messaging was only offered in the Germanic and Romance languages. Arab's necessarily adapted to these tools, and created a system allowing them to write Arabic sentences using English letters, a form of texting known as 3arabizi. Users also added numbers to expand the English alphabet to represent phonetics existing only within the Arabic language. For instance, in 3arabizi, the number 3 represents the Arabic letter "ع" (Ayn). The system became a popular component of pop culture for youth in the MENA region, with the system still in use to this day.

While some people call the system "3arabizi," others refer to it as "Franco-Arabic;" regardless of the name, it has proven to be a useful tool. The 3arabizi system fills a large gap in communication technologies; satisfying the needs for a sizeable community of previously marginalized users, namely, native Arabic-speakers. Although Arabs are now afforded the ability to take full advantage of modern interpersonal communication devices and digitized systems in Arabic, many still prefer to use the 3arabizi system for texting or typing in the Arabic language. The 3arabizi system does not require users to speak and its sole function is to communicate within a digitized system by combining visual representations of Roman letters and numbers. Rather, the only requirements the system calls for, is that the users possess two hands, ten fingers, a functioning set of eyes, and the capacity to read and write in Arabic. Additionally, due to its interchangeable nature and cross-platform abilities, 3arabizi can be used within any operating system, and on all digital devices.



(Fig. 1) Stills to demonstrate the hands counting the supplications



(Fig. 2) Stills to demonstrate the usage of this counting system to text on any device

During my investigation, I found a connection linking the 3arabizi system to how Muslims typically use their hands and fingers as a gesturing method to keep track of their supplications. In the Islamic practice known as "Zikr," by utilizing either a string of beads (misbaha/sibha), as a tracking method, or their own fingers, touching tip to joint, Muslims repeatedly count up to ninety-nine – representative of the *Ninety-Nine Most Beautiful Names of Allah*. (See Fig.1&2) To further reflect the MENA context, the English keyboard was given this counting system, by creating 26 buttons for the two hands. By typing on his/her hand, a sensor could detect the hand movement and type on any device for the user. This idea could enable an international audience to know and experience something that has a reference from the MENA culture.

### Investigation 2: Egyptian Characters

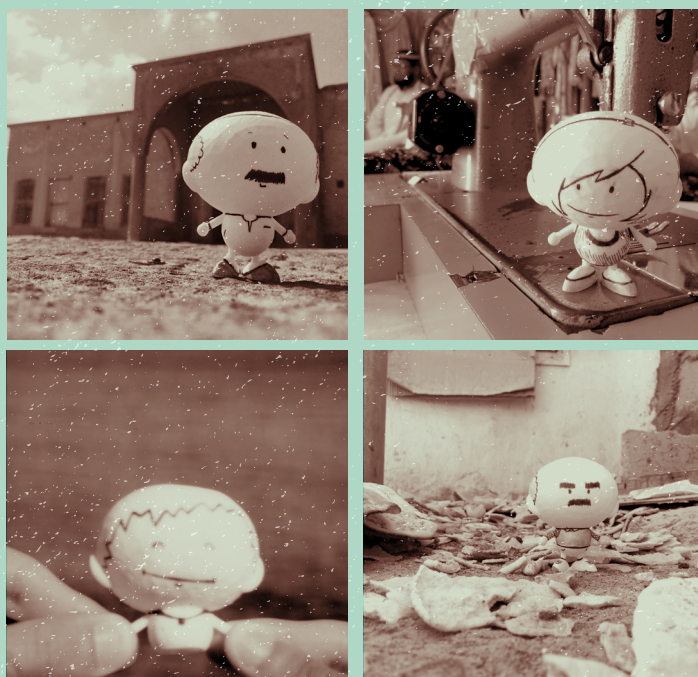
In the second investigation, I observed and explored numerous ways that foreign culture, and other globalized systems, affect and influence modern Egyptian society – as viewed through my own lens. As part of the investigation, I designed a fully customizable character template, which I then utilized throughout the entire developmental process. The template allowed me to build cultural narratives around individually customized characters. After coming up with the idea, I developed the concept further, using Rhino and 3D printing to make the finalized model. I used my 3D models to create

visual representations as a way to conduct a comprehensive exploration of Egyptian identity and cultural aspects by depicting the many different elements and scenarios comprised within everyday Egyptian life. Using a variety of differently colored markers, I drew unique details on each character as a way to help identify what was "Egyptian" about each one (See Fig. 3). At its core, this investigation links "the old" together with "the new." The project acts as a bridge between traditional storytelling methods and the modernized concepts of building narratives through digital development, or creative storytelling, with 3D technologies.

Even though I am a designer, first and foremost, I found that locating narratives to use for the research was the most challenging element of the entire investigation, but also, the most interesting. Especially, given that the entirety of this investigation was conducted outside of Egypt, my home country, I had to locate and develop those narratives from around Qatar – a context that is foreign and unfamiliar to me. Interestingly, I discovered that, by putting into practice, my concept of "culture hacking, as a method," and accounting for any limiting factors of my surrounding context, I was able to easily differentiate between the things that were familiar to me, and those concepts that were not. Also, seeing as how most of the countries in this region possess a similar landscape of available media and movies, many GCC natives can easily identify certain characteristics or traits that they know are distinctly Egyptian. With this in mind, the intent of this investigation is to gain a better understanding of how a previously defined concept, like "identity" or "culture", can change or become altered, depending on a specific context. As part of this study, I developed unique research methods to use in my pursuit of that goal. As a result, the research outcomes are direct reflections of my own comprehensive exploration of the investigation's core concepts. (See Fig. 3,4,5&6)

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Kareem Darwish, "Arabizi Detection and Conversion to Arabic," accessed March 25, 2016, <http://anthology.aclweb.org/W/W14/W14-3629.pdf>.



(Fig. 3,4,5&6) The process shows the production and embedding the characters to different settings



كذلك  
الشيخ



### Investigation 3: Printing from Snapchat

In my third investigation, I adapted external systems to my design process to explore concepts related to my context to challenge my visual outputs. I generally consider myself to have a visually expressive personality and it should come as no surprise that i am interested in photography as a medium. In fact, I appreciate both digital and analogue in equal measure. However, analogue photography *still* possesses one major advantage over its digital counterpart. That is, when an image is developed on film, it is captured forever. In this project, I wanted to take certain elements that are inherent with the digital photographic method, such as immediacy and mobility, and combine them with the concept of finality, borrowed from the

analogue method. Utilizing the massively popular cross-platform phone application “Snapchat” – an application entirely structured around the concept of temporarily sharing pictures and videos within a digitized system – I devised a method to change the temporarily available content into something to keep forever.

As I have been using and exploring the Snapchat application for over two years, I discovered that I was able to “hack” the system, simply by saving the temporary content before it expired and printing it afterward. To do this, I first had to save my selected images (or, “snaps”) onto my phone before the timer ran out – in this case, the snaps were of various places I had

visited during a recent trip to Egypt. Then, using my computer, I printed out the snaps I had saved on my phone, in the form of negatives (See Fig. 1). Once they were printed, I was then able to develop them into pictures, using a darkroom. Utilizing this hacking method allowed me to keep the only captured visual representations of my life, as it existed in that time and space, before the temporarily available content was lost forever (See Fig. 2). Although both systems are equally familiar to most youth culture in Qatar and Egypt, my findings provide a link to bridge them together through the popular medium. This contributes to ongoing discussions within the field, and link between two different media conceptually and methodologically.



(Fig. 1&2) The negative of the Snaps I took in Egypt, and the developed print



## Investigation 4: Analog Projections

As argued in his four-part research video series, “Everything is a Remix,” Kirby Ferguson, a New York-based researcher and filmmaker, claims that, nothing is ever entirely “new;” rather, “Our new ideas evolve from the old ones.”<sup>1</sup> If this is true, parallel thinking dictates that although every living person possesses their own concept of “self-identity” (including where they came from, who they are as an individual person, and what they can become in the future) not a one of them should ever be considered “new.” Just as every new idea is merely just an evolution of something that came before, the concept of self-identity is similarly developed. At the same time, the concept of self-identity is largely refined during a person’s early formative years and is heavily influenced by the experiences and teachings of the generations before. In that way, there is no such thing, as a “new” person. Even further, according to Ferguson’s logic, each person’s sense of self-identity (as he or she understands it) is simply just an evolved version of all the “self-identities” that came before it.

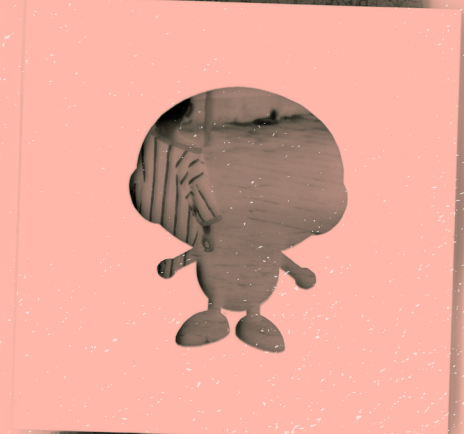
As a way of showing the interconnectedness of this concept, I utilized the template I created with a mix of mediums to explore a range of influences and interests. Images representing those influences were printed on transparent sheets of paper. These were layered on top of each other and the overlapping transparency in the photographs created more stories and more complicated personalities (See Fig. 34,35,36,37&38). By seeing the various images stacked on top of one another, and projected as individual collages, people could visually interpret the projected images in a number of different ways. Even further, people could guess the person represented through the combination of the template and the layered images.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Kirby Ferguson, “Everything Is a Remix,” Everything Is a Remix, accessed November 17, 2015, <http://everythingisaremix.info/>.



(Fig. 3,4,5&6) The process of applying set of images to the analog projector





# الأنظمة الخارجية والداخلية

## The MFA program's culture:

### Defining the culture:

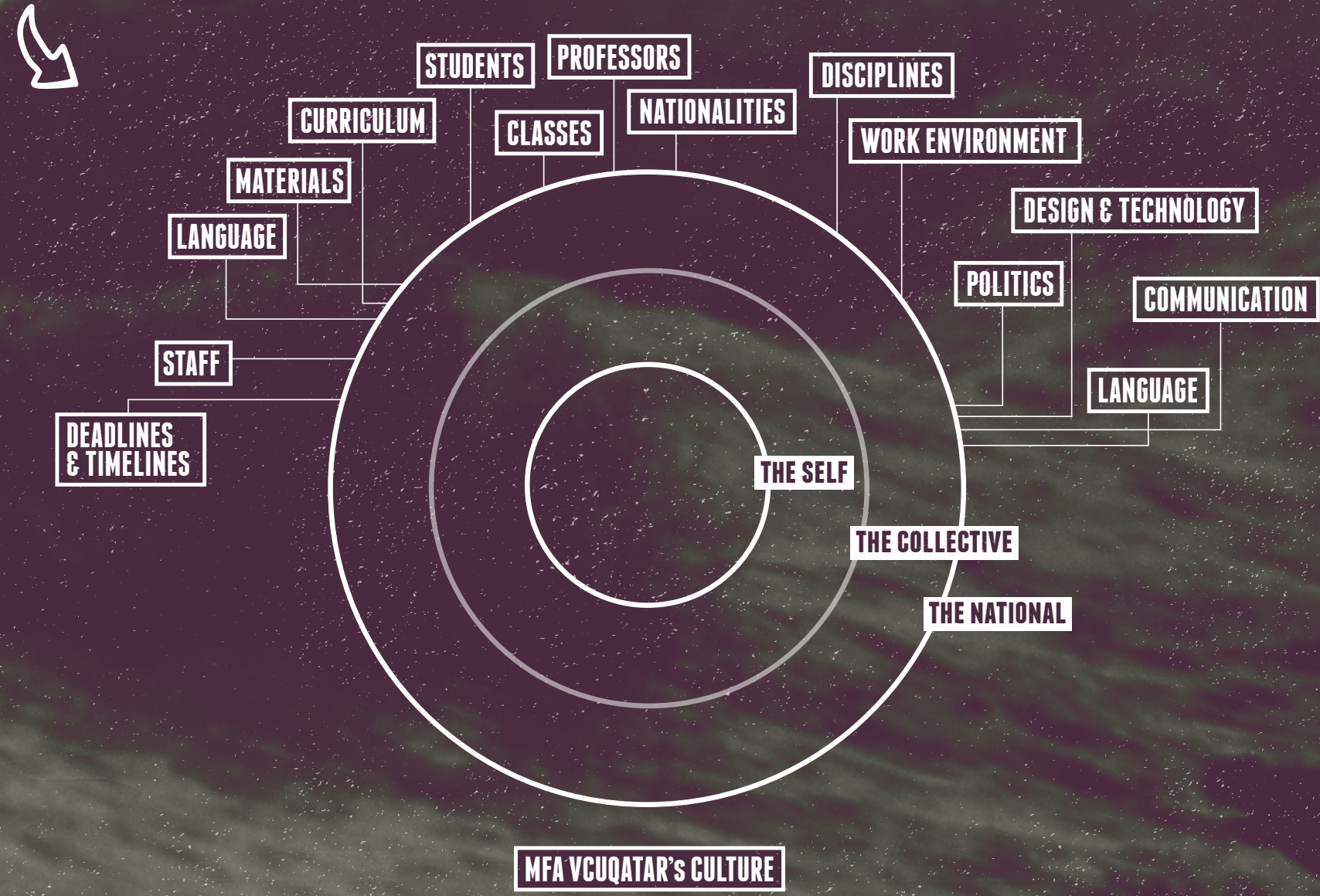
The case study for this research focuses on the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Design Studies program at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar (VCUQatar). Due to its established interdisciplinary design approach, MFA culture has its own values, rituals, traditions, imported systems, influences and dominant symbols. Based on Professor Ite Choudhury's definition of culture,<sup>1</sup> MFA students come from a variety of backgrounds including design, architecture, engineering and business. The aim is for students in Qatar to receive the same quality education that students receive on the main campus in Richmond, Virginia, USA. Consequently, there are several external systems and influences related to being an American university with its own system, rules and regulations. Despite sharing a similarly structured education curriculum, the campus culture at VCUQatar differs from that of its American counterpart (See Fig. 1).

The MFA curriculum focuses on the notion of "empirical vagueness,"<sup>2</sup> a strategy aimed at blurring the borders between creative disciplines. The self, the collective, and the national circles play an important role in defining the MFA culture and how they communicate, share, explore, overlap, and produce together (See Fig. 2). This research examines different culture hacking methodologies developed in reaction to external systems influencing the MFA program. The design methodology provides a strategic process to help identify and criticize gaps, or cracks in the culture. As a member of this community for the past two years, I gathered intimate knowledge about the intricacies of the cultural context and believe it provides a unique opportunity to explore hacking as a method.



(Fig.1) The Diagram represents the globalized systems, the culture and the hacking culture

(Fig.2) The Diagram represents different components in the MFA program's culture





The culture hacking tools and methodology:

Assembling a set of tools for the study was a crucial component of the process and enabled me to take on the role of observer, critic, and hacker during the investigation. Filtering the outcomes through my lens aims to encourage the audience to take on my perspective, as an Egyptian Muslim student. The Egyptianized tools are the result of my self-reflected experiences, values, references and beliefs, post Arab spring, that could be used and translated in a numerous range of visual communication media, formats, languages, behaviors and keywords. Also, I embedded the Egyptian wit and irony to the tools to celebrate and criticize the collected data. (See Fig. 3&4)

The openness of the culture allows for research to occur in a number of ways, including observational analysis, ethnographic study, and open-ended interviews. The research is documented and creatively interpreted through writing, audio recording, video, and photography. As a member of the culture under study, the greatest challenge of the research process presented itself in the form of potential unconscious bias. The research, therefore, requires critical thinking and the ability to critique myself without internal or external influences. I grounded the method's principles on Sebastien Paquet, a researcher and a professor. Paquet's method is based on observing, finding the crack, catalyzing and institutionalizing.<sup>3</sup> The method I developed is divided into 8 steps: take daily footage, collect material, edit the footage, find the crack, build a conceptual framework, Egyptianize, create a visual language, expose and document.



EGYPTIANIZATION

THE TOOLS

BILINGUAL “ARABIC & ENGLISH”  
CRITICIZING, APPROPRIATING  
METAMORPHOSING & CELEBRATING  
AMPLIFYING & EXAGGERATING  
WIT & IRONY  
BODY LANGUAGE  
ILLUSTRATING  
SKETCHING  
USING TYPOGRAPHY  
TIME-BASED MEDIA  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS & APPS

(Fig.3 &4) The tools and keywords used to Egyptianize the culture

KEYWORDS

THE TOOLS



Notes:

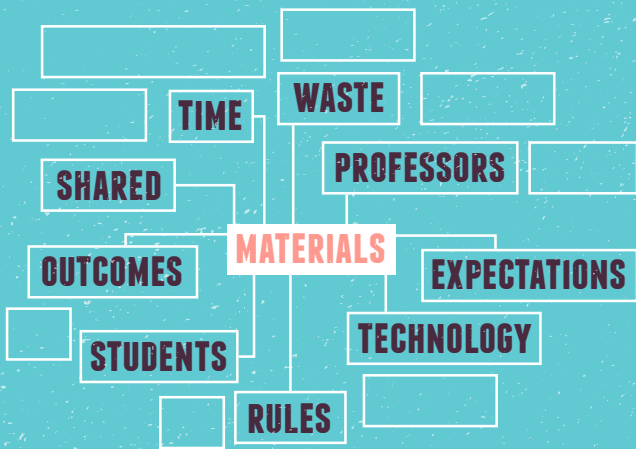
- 1 Ifte Choudhury, "Culture Definition," Texas A&M University, accessed February 10, 2016, <https://www.tamu.edu/faculty/choudhury/culture.html>.
- 2 "MFA in Design Studies Program Handbook 2015 - 2016," Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, accessed March 27, 2016, <http://www.qatar.vcu.edu/images/uploads/documents/MFA-ProgramHandbook-2015-16.pdf>.
- 3 ignitemontreal; How to Become a Culture Hacker - Seb Paquet @ Ignite Montreal, accessed March 28, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojQT6U-gRAM&list=PLDzRN7sO320aP8SGiGDLqGc-gAoe-gPkL&index=23>.



# THE METHODS TO HACK THE CULTURE

النظام  
للثقافة

## The method to Hack:



(Fig.1) The tools and keywords used to Egyptianize the culture in 8 steps

1. TAKE DAILY FOOTAGE
2. COLLECT MATERIALS
3. CHOOSE & EDIT MATERIALS
4. FIND THE CRACK
5. BUILD A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
6. EGYPTIANIZE
7. CREATE A VISUAL LANGUAGE
8. EXPOSURE & DOCUMENTATION

THE CULTURE

THE KEYWORDS TO ANALYZE

THE TOOLS “EGYPTIANIZATION”

### 1- Taking daily footage:

For the last 7 years, I have experimented with audiovisual mediums and techniques as part of my creative practice. The basic rules of motion picture and photography include composition, framing, lighting, movement, timing and editing. While a moving image needs at least 24 frames per second to see a smooth movement, every frame represents an image that contains a photography principle. In my creative practice, photography and videography are similar to sketching, allowing me to explore my ideas visually. As part of the research, I filmed daily events and activities in the MFA program's culture using *guerrilla video*. This style of filming requires planning and structure, but also requires immediate responsiveness from the hacker. Any kind of camera can be used in guerrilla video because it captures the subject matter in natural settings and events<sup>1</sup>, such as filming students while they are working or capturing a conversation between professors (See Fig. 2).



(Fig.2) Stills from the daily footage from the culture

### 2- Collect material:

The use of photography and video footage allowed me to analyze events and happenings on a daily basis. Over time, themes emerge naturally within the collective footage and guide me into tangible observations to identify the crack. Filming alone cannot fully answer my questions, making it important to also collect official or unofficial documents like handbooks, letters, or emails. Casual and formal conversations that occur face-to-face or via a phone can also contribute to the methodology.

### 3- Choose material and edit the footage:

Once I completed the collecting phase, selective editing of the material and footage allowed observations and questions to emerge. The editing process had to remain consistent to allow me to visually merge the differing footage (taken at different times in the process) and to allow the audience to focus on the narration, rather than the technical issues.

### 4- Find the crack:

During the editing process, I continued to investigate and consider the research questions through analysis of the gathered information. Questions raised during the editing phase, indicate a current social, political or educational concern within the culture such as unusual behaviors, miscommunication, or conflict of interests. Identifying the crack based on the collected data helped me to find ways to criticize the crack in a cultural, social and/or political manner.

### 5- Build a conceptual framework:

By identifying the crack, I can determine the audience and choose an appropriate medium to deliver the visual commentary. This involves defining the objectives and answering the what, who, why, and how of the design problem. As part of the design process, a range of tools and ways can help test and document the impact of the hack.

### 6- Egyptianize:

I picked and implemented precisely the Egyptianized tools, in order to begin to address the crack through hacking. In the case of this study, Egyptianized tools (identified previously) were used to put the audience in my perspective. The tools demonstrate the characteristics of myself and explain the importance of my approach to the crack. Then, I worked to create a visual representation to engage with the audience using appropriate tools within the conceptual framework.

### 7- Create a visual language:

A visual system showcases the process and breaks down the outcome into three stages, including (a) screening of video process; (b) demonstrating the crack through a selected clip from the video; and (c) creating a visual representation to symbolize the hacked culture (See Fig. 3).

### 8- Exposure and documentation:

To properly evaluate the impact of the process and the outcome, I utilized the element of surprise to keep the audience in the dark until exposure occurs. Exposing the visual representation requires careful attention to timing, place, audience, and visual references. If one of the elements is incorrectly implemented, the method will fail. After the visual representation is exposed, I will receive reactions from the audience, in both positive and negative terms. I have to take note of the range of reactions during the exposure, making sure to document and cleverly respond.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Frank Popper, *Art of the Electronic Age* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1997), chap. Video Art, 55.

## OUTCOME

(Fig.3) The diagram shows the designed visual structure for the outcomes

### A. 2 WEEKS VIDEO, PROCESS



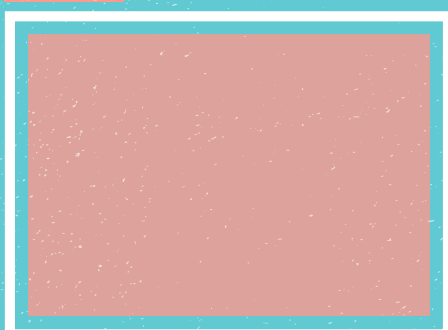
2 WEEKS VIDEO, PROCESS

### B. THE CRACK



THE CRACK

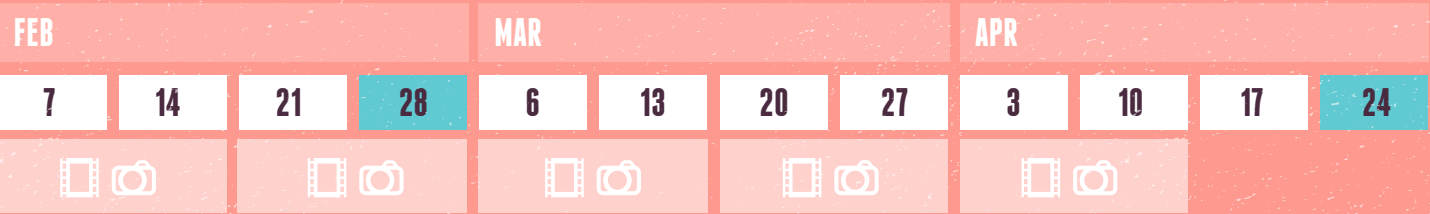
### C. HACKED



HACKED!



Applying the method:



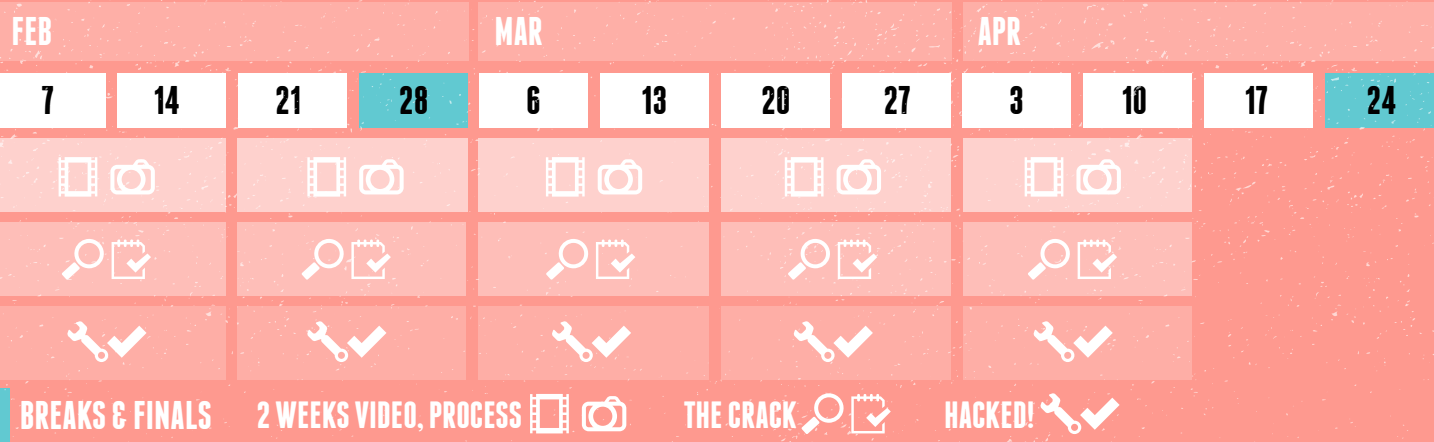
(Fig.4) The timeline known by the culture for finding the crack and producing a video

This observation and examination took part of the MFA program’s daily activities and happenings for 10 weeks, with letting the audience, outside or inside the culture, know that the method will be used to observe, document and produce a video as an outcome that reflects the six students thesis topics. Using the Egyptianize tools to criticize in six different videos their process and the obstacles they faced in the culture. (See Fig. 4)



(Fig.5) The diagram shows the layers of knowing in this process

On the other side, my thesis committee members and the director of the MFA program know the actual process of applying the culture hacking method on the MFA program’s culture. (See Fig. 5) I have to divert from what the people in the culture know, as a process and outcomes, to get their real reactions and feedback from the raised questions, using step number eight, which is exposure and documentation.

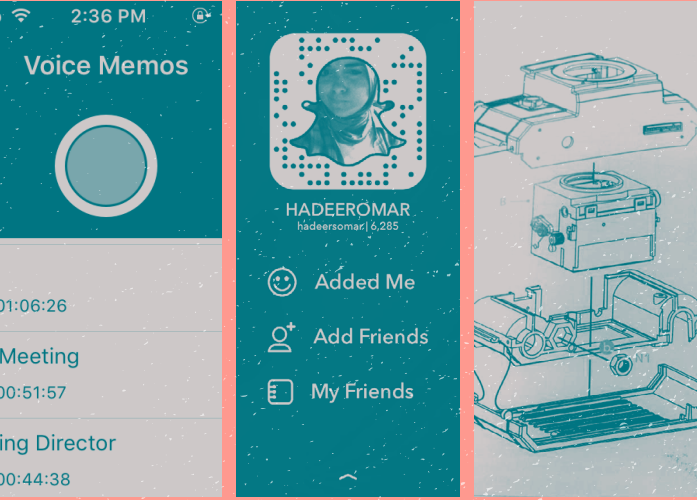


(Fig.6) The actual timeline known by thesis committee members

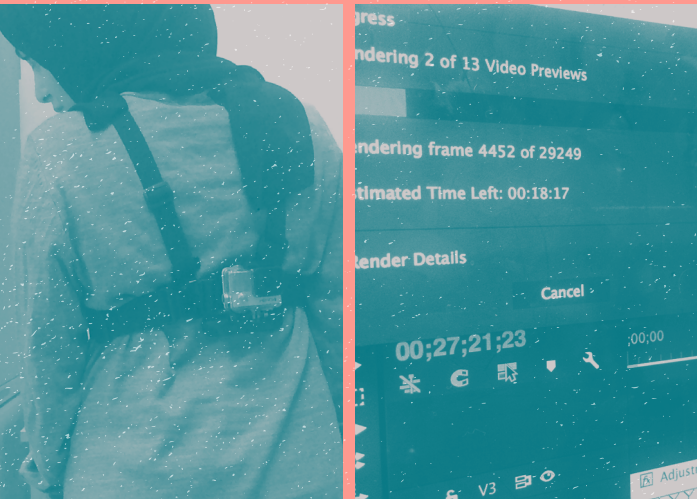
In the actual timeline, this thesis process will use the method to produce 5 videos for every 2 weeks, find five cracks in the culture and generate five visual representations. (See. Fig. 6)

The cracks:

When the first week of the investigations kicked off, I reached out to find new methods of recording and filming the daily events and activities (See Fig.7,8&9) Not everyone was fine being filmed at the beginning and not all the time, so it was impossible for me to film with a big DSLR everyday. I decided to use my phone and it became my default way of recording and documenting daily. Also, Snapchat became another method to film the informal events, such as, lunches, gatherings, working in fab labs at night, or in the classrooms. It was very difficult to film meetings or arguments, so I recorded using the voice memos application, to collect materials and information that could support the crack. I tried new ways to get different perspectives in recording with the camera; for instance, I placed the Gopro on my back, to record what happens behind my back in the culture. (See Fig. 10&11) All the footage get collected and edited by any editing software daily, to reflect and critique the material, and search for better ways to experiment next week. Besides, using technology, I documented with film cameras to have diversity in the style of filming and get different qualities from each technique.



(Fig.7,8&9) Different ways of documentation (digital or analog)



(Fig.10&11) Different tools for documenting daily

I pushed myself to be there in the culture the five days of the week, even if I didn’t have classes on that day, to capture and save as much as I can information and events. (See Fig. 12) The edited videos were uploaded on a Google drive that is share with the thesis committee, to be in the loop and follow the process.

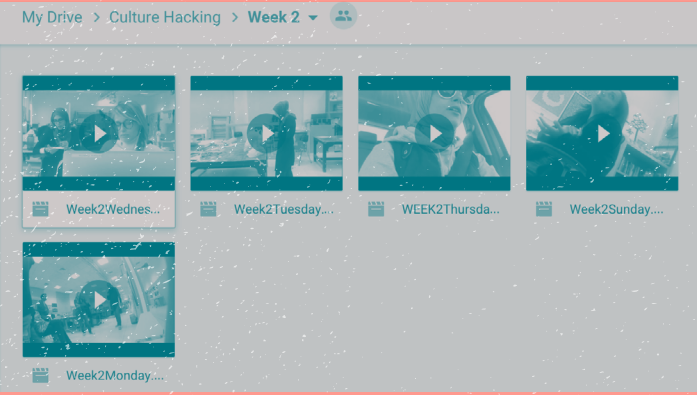
(See Fig. 13,14&15) I became motivated to keep developing this technique and improve the guerrilla style that I am using. I borrowed the method that Casey Neistat, a filmmaker and Youtuber uses for his blogs, based on Nic Haralambous, every shot matters, being consistent, perfection isn’t everything and tell a story well.<sup>1</sup>



(Fig.12) Daily videos edited and uploaded to the Google drive

📅	Week 7	me	Mar 21, 2016
📅	Week 6	me	Mar 19, 2016
📅	Week 5	me	Mar 6, 2016
📅	Week 3	me	Feb 22, 2016
📅	Week 2	me	Feb 15, 2016
📅	Week 1	me	Feb 9, 2016

(Fig.13) The Drive shows the timeline for each week and dates

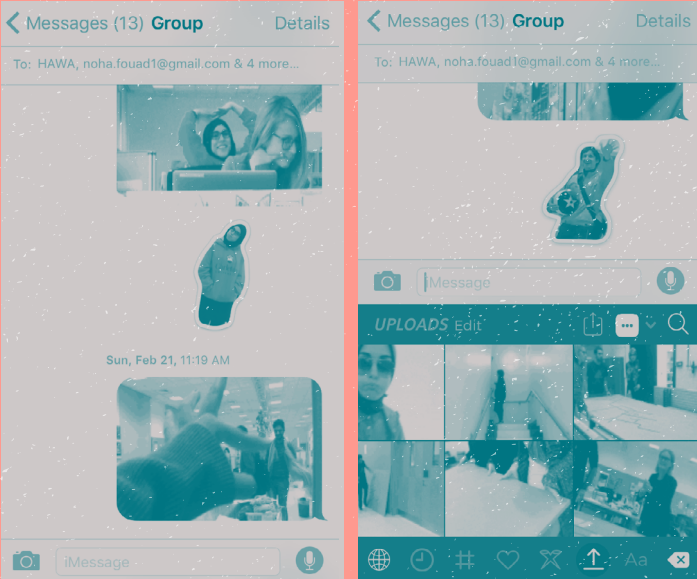


(Fig.14) Every folder is representing a week, which contains five videos



(Fig.15) Guerrilla style was used for most of the videos

After one week of experimenting with filming and recording techniques. I wanted to test the materials I have and use familiar platforms that my audience could relate to. The text messaging technology is used on a daily basis, which the communication is formal and informal between my classmates and me in the culture. I created GIF files and emojis with the videos I generated in the first week, each GIF and emoji symbolized a moment that my classmates and me shared together and have reference for each file. Then, I uploaded them to be accessible on the phone’s keyboard. They became part of our daily digital communication, by producing those set of visual languages.(See Fig. 16,17&18)



(Fig.16,17&18) The gifs and emojis are used on different platforms

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Nic Haralambous, “10 Things I Learned From Casey Neistat’s Daily Vlog,” Medium, May 15, 2015, <https://medium.com/found-it/10-things-i-learned-from-casey-neistat-s-daily-vlog-d034cd016be4>.



Crack 1: Accredit me:  
The National Association  
of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD)



(Fig.1) The diagram demonstrates the action, the culture and the reaction

Every ten years, the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) subject Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), in the United States, to an accreditation evaluation<sup>1</sup>. As part of this process, NASAD requires self-evaluation reports from both, the VCU main campus, in Richmond, VA, and the VCUQatar campus, in Doha, Qatar. The grueling process evaluates university curriculum, its quality of research, the collected bodies of work of its faculty, as well as the performance of its student body. Though a difficult process if passed the resulting NASAD accreditation provides degree equivalency for both VCU campuses.

During week 3 of the investigation, the NASAD accreditation team came to the VCUQatar campus. Given its level of importance, everyone was working to showcase the students’ work, in the hallways and around the classrooms. It was around this time when I first began questioning about my VCUQatar education. Although i was pursuing my Master of Fine Arts in Design Studies from an American university (VCU), the program itself is taught in the Middle East region (Qatar). Despite the culture’s location, however, the accreditation process does not involve or consult with the local ministries during the evaluation period. Instead, much like our education, the NASAD evaluation process is an imported system; it identifies and demands “quality,” without first appropriating its assessment system to fit within the local context. (See Fig.1)

On the day of their visit, the NASAD team toured the VCUQatar campus, and met with various professors and department heads. As a graphic designer/culture hacker, I decided to take advantage of this opportunity to express my concerns regarding imported external systems. I designed a set of stickers and attached them to all of the MFA students’ work; each one expressing a different message about the crack – such as “Accredit me,” “Egyptians learn differently,” and “Businesses only care about the wasia (powerful connections), not the degree.” (See Fig. 2&3)



(Fig.2&3) The NASAD stickers, and enhancing them to the space

vcuqatar   virginia commonwealth university in qatar   p.o. box 8888, doha, qatar   www.qatar.vcu.edu   p +974 4402 0555 f +974 4402 1425			
NASAD ITINERARY			
Monday, Feb. 22, 2016			
08:00 -	Depart hotel to VCUQatar via hotel limo		
09:00 - 12:00	Katherine McCoy meeting:		
	o Art Foundation	09:00-09:30	
	o Interior Design	09:35-10:05	
	o Graphic Design	10:10-10:40	
	o Fashion Design	10:45-11:15	
	o MFA	11:20-11:40	
09:00 -10:30	Nan Goggin and Kristi Nelson meeting:		
	o Painting & Printmaking	09:00-09:30	
	o Art History	09:40-10:10	
10:30 - 12:00	Goggin and Nelson meeting with support facilities and labs:		
	o Materials Library - Prof. Richard Lombard	10:30-10:50	
	o Innovative Media Studio - Prof. Diane Derr	10:50-11:10	
	o Photo Studio - Prof. Diane Derr	11:15-11:20	
	o Jewelry Studio	11:20-11:40	
	o Digital Fab. Lab and Woodshop		
12:00 - 13:00	Lunch with Dean Kahera & Dean Seipel Location: VIP room		
13:30 - 14:30	Tour continues		
	1. Library: Amy J. Andres, Interim Dir. of Library and team Location: Library / Conference room 1061		
	2. Admissions: Greet Provoost, Assistant Dean, Enrollment and Registration Services and team Location: Admissions / Conference room 1071		
	3. Gallery Faculty Exhibition: Prof. Holiday Powers, Meike Kaan and Isabelle St-Louis, Manager of Exhibitions and Lecture Series Location: VCUQatar Gallery		
14:30 - 15:30	Meeting with Undergraduate students Location: Atrium		
15:30 -17:30	Depart to Museum of Islamic Arts		
19:00 -	Dinner at Souq Waqif - Paris Restaurant with Deans and Senior Team o Dean Akel Kahera, VCUQatar		



(Fig.4&5) The NASAD accreditation team's itinerary and their tour in the MFA department

Given that I carried out this mission in secret, no one knew why the stickers were there, or where they came from. Although, several students suspected I was behind it, and asked me as much. I freely admitted to guilt, but only told them it was part of an experiment. When the team finally toured the exhibition space, they quickly noticed the stickers and inquired about their meaning. (See Fig. 4&5) Without divulging too much, the professors explained that one of the students was investigating culture hacking, as a reactionary methodology, and that he/she was experimenting on the MFA program.(See Fig. 6&7)

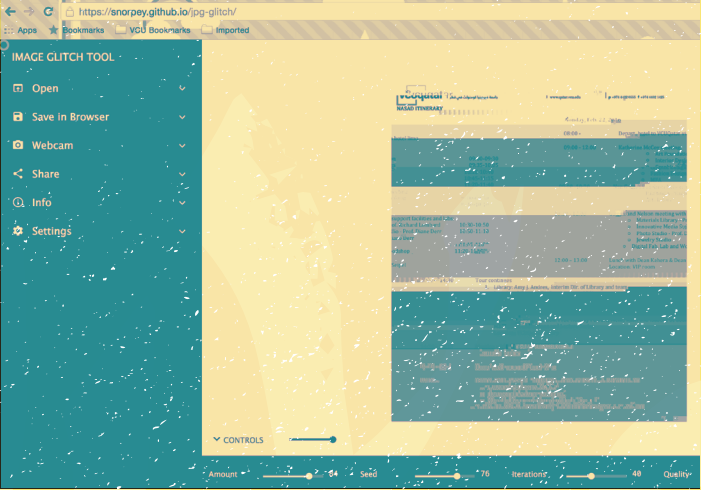
The response:

Understandably, not every student was happy with me putting stickers all over their work. While some students wished I had asked their permission first, the majority of them were fine. Additionally, although most of them understood my process, and were relatively aware of this particular crack, they still did not comprehend the purpose of my experiment.



(Fig.6&7) The stickers applied to the students work

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	o MFA	11:20-11:40	
09:00 -10:30	Nan Goggin and Kristi Nelson meeting:		
	o Painting & Printmaking	09:00-09:30	
	o Art History	09:40-10:10	
10:30 - 12:00	EGYPTIANS LEARN DIFFERENTLY		
		10:10:50	
		10:11:10	
		15:11:20	
		10:11:40	
12:00 - 13:00			
13:30 - 14:30	3. Gallery Faculty Exhibition: Prof. Holiday Powers, Meike Kaan and Isabelle St-Louis, Manager of Exhibitions and Lecture Series Location: VCUQatar Gallery		
14:30 - 15:30	Meeting with Undergraduate students Location: Atrium		
15:30 -17:30	Depart to Museum of Islamic Arts		
19:00 -	Dinner at Souq Waqif - Paris Restaurant with Deans and Senior Team		
	o Dean Akel Kahera, VCUQatar		
	o Dean Seipel, VCUarts Richmond		
	o Gary Huff, Associate Dean for Administration		



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10:30 - 12:00	EGYPTIANS LEARN DIFFERENTLY		
		10:10:50	
		10:11:10	
		15:11:20	
		10:11:40	
12:00 - 13:00			
13:30 - 14:30			

(Fig.8) The “glitching process” applied to hack the official documents





## Are you sure you want to change the extension from “.txt” to “.jpg”?

If you make this change, your document may open in a different application.

Keep .txt

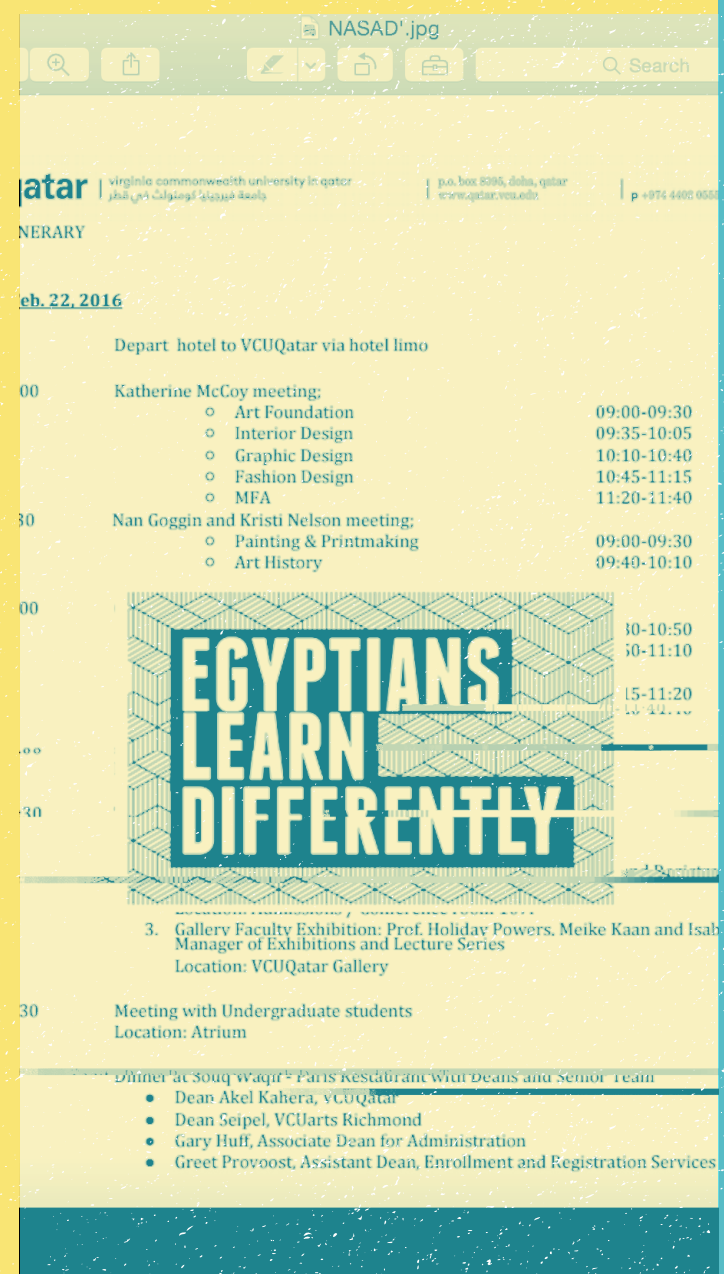
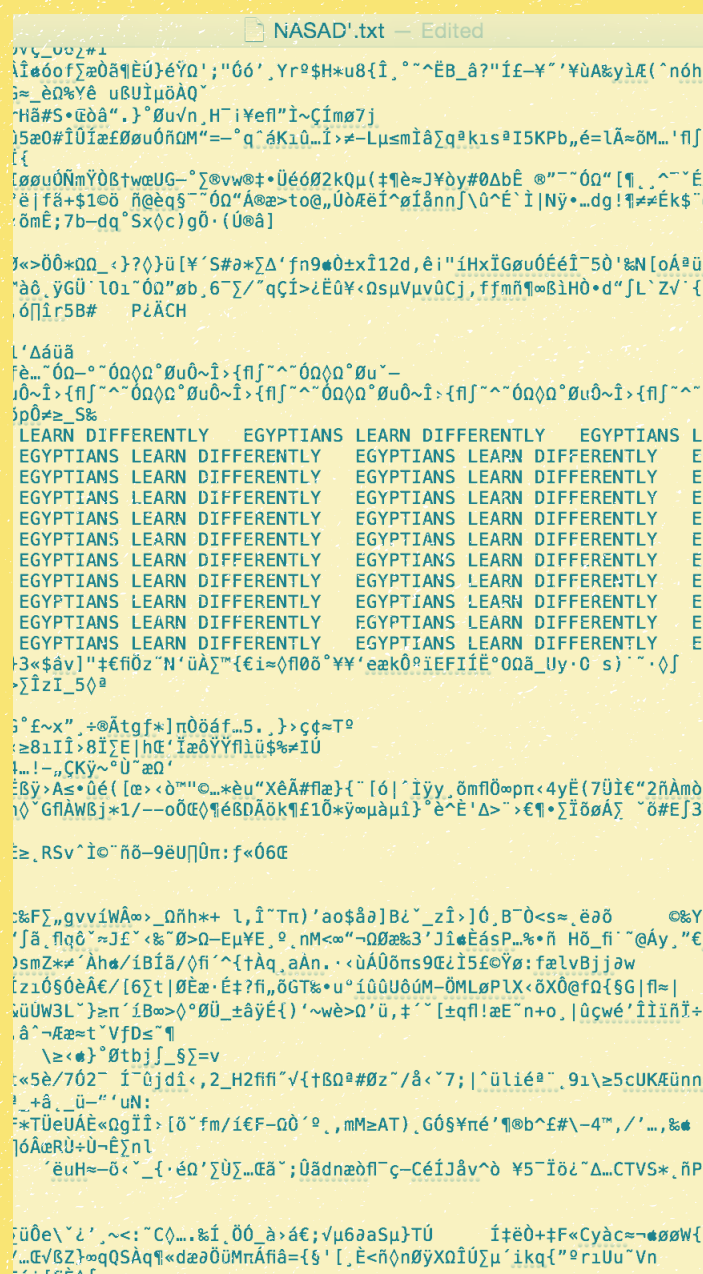
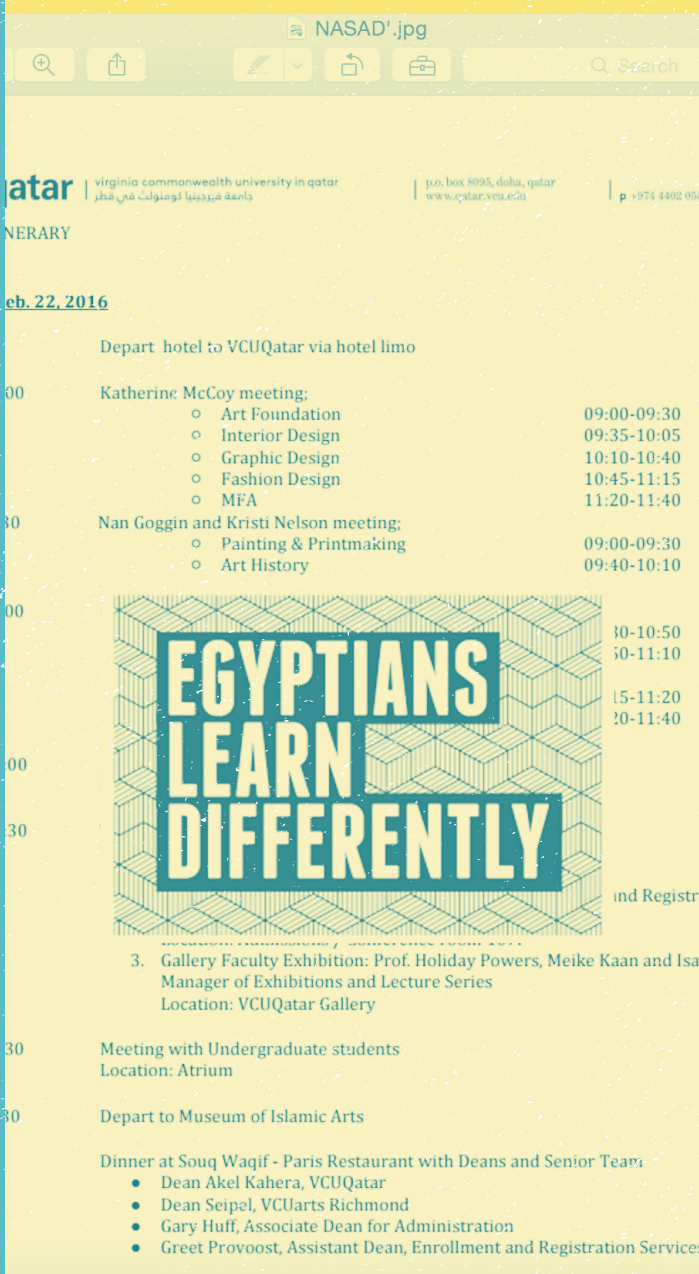
Use .jpg

People frequently make errors or mistakes trying to adapt foreign systems into new contexts, because they often lack familiarity with localized systems. The action has been hacked with this type of reaction from NASAD accreditation team members, by “glitching” their daily itinerary. Utilizing the sticker set to change its visual representation, I altered the official document’s intended purpose. (See Fig. 8) This type of resistance allowed me to make a visual commentary on embedding different external ideologies and university structures to our local context.

Another glitching method I used, was substituting the document extension from .jpg to .txt, which converts the file to an editable text document. This hack allowed me to input my own content, such as “Egyptians learn differently,” directly onto the converted text file, changing its intended meaning. Then, after reverting the altered document back to its original .jpg extension, I simply repeated the process using different messages and other files. As a result, the hacked images served a different role, other than what was originally intended; repurposed for new specifications, based on my input. (See Fig. 9)

### Notes:

1 “National Association of Schools of Art and Design NASAD,” “National Association of Schools of Art and Design, accessed March 31, 2016, [http://nasad.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/Handbook/NASAD\\_HANDBOOK\\_2015-16.pdf](http://nasad.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/Handbook/NASAD_HANDBOOK_2015-16.pdf).



(Fig.9) The steps of “glitching” using textedit software



# Crack 2: Reveal me: The MFA program & VCUQatar



(Fig.1) The diagram demonstrates the action, the culture and the reaction

The MFA program is only one of the degree programs at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar. In fact, the renowned university houses several. Each different discipline symbolizes an external influence, introducing foreign systems into the culture. Although, due to the interdisciplinary make-up of the MFA program, the culture’s internal systems constantly clash with its various other influences; blurring lines and crossing boundaries, even within culture itself. This friction creates a sense of uncertainty amongst the other systems, making it reliant on using empirical vagueness as a method for the creative processes and for understanding the vision of the culture. (See Fig. 1) For instance, within the last two years alone, the culture changed directors three times in four semesters. Due to these frequent changes, the culture lacks a constant and cohesive leadership structure, and that instability influences other external systems. The external systems (VCU Richmond and VCUQatar) both took part in evaluating candidates to serve as the new program director. Heads of other departments and faculty attended the presentations and meetings to be part of the process. Also, the people within the culture attended, to evaluate if the candidates will be able to adapt to the culture. (See Fig. 2&3)

In order to make the external influences and systems aware of what elements define the culture, communication needs to be clear and straightforward – especially if the program is unique, as in this context. In response to the crack, I interviewed numerous faculty and students within the VCUQatar culture; asking the following two questions:

- (a) what do we do in the MFA program?
- (b) What does “empirical vagueness” mean?



(Fig.2) The external systems and the culture attending the presentations for the candidates



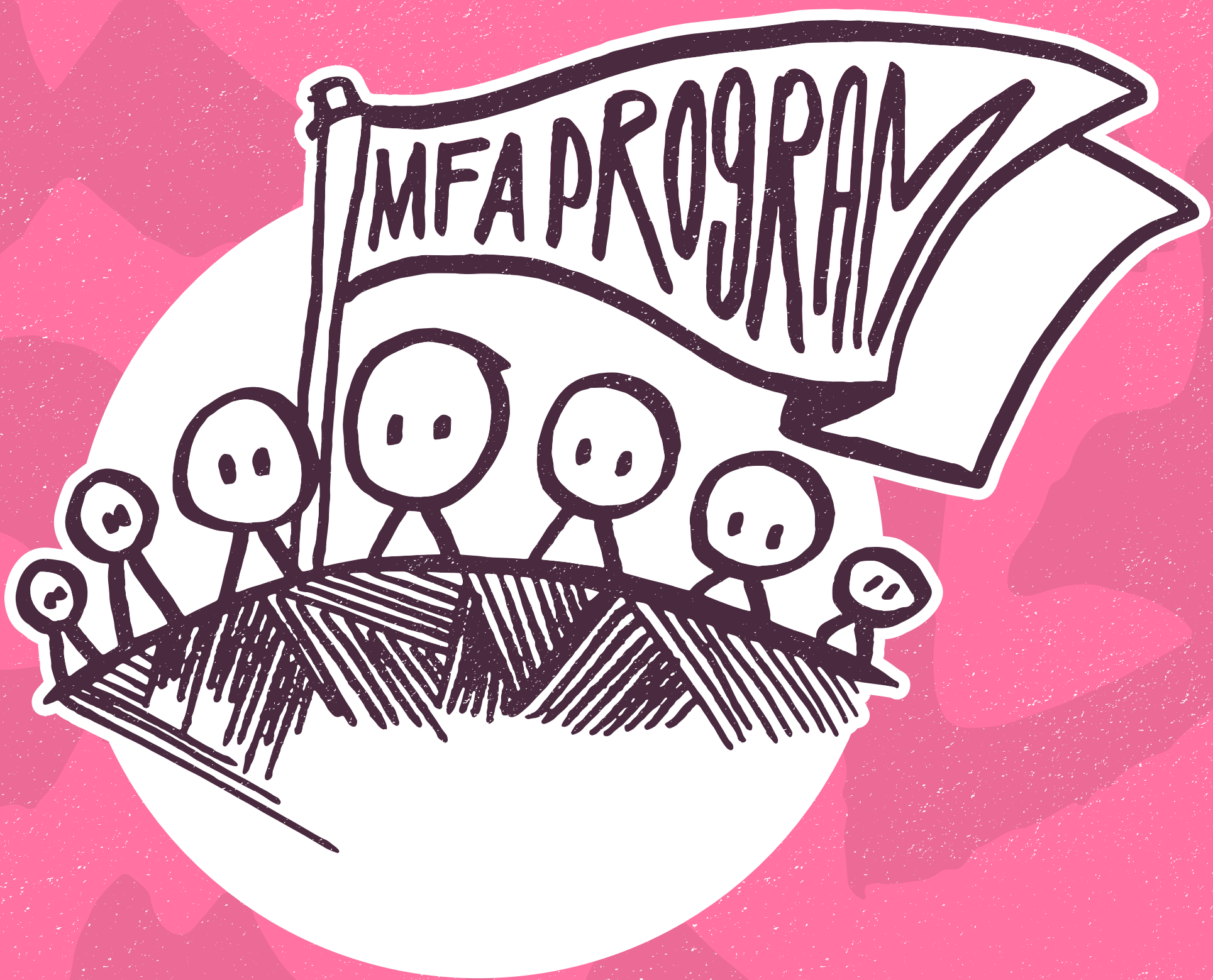
(Fig3) The external systems and the culture evaluating the candidates

The people within the external systems and influences answered the questions, each one representative of their understanding and references from interacting with the culture. A database was created based on the responses of those interviewed, and categorized accordingly. Based on the questions, most people responded with three types of answers. Some explained what we do, based on what they observed in our workspaces, MFA exhibition or lectures. Others based their answers on word of mouth within the external systems, and others, especially students, some of them had no idea about what we do. Their responses were instinctive and sincere, since I am a student like them and I asked the questions in an informal format to collect the data. (See Fig.4)



(Fig.4) The external systems and the culture answering the questions given to them







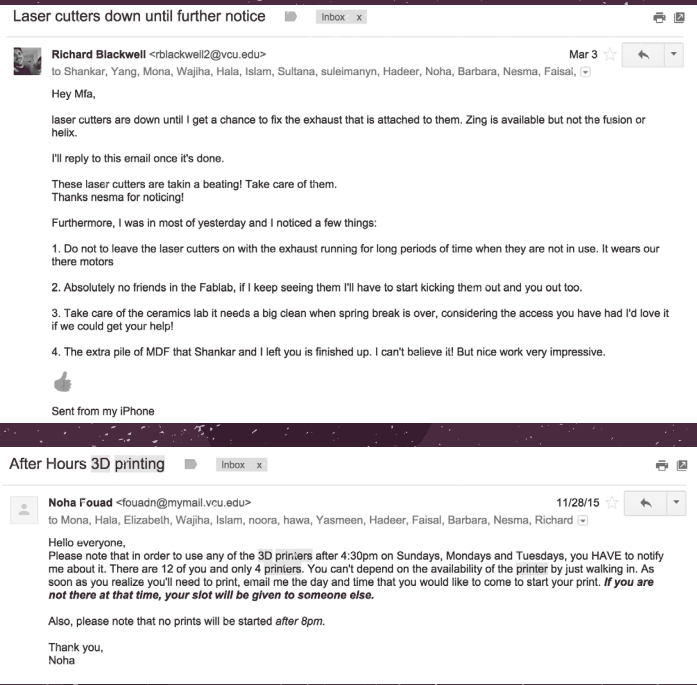
# Crack 3: Fabricate me: Design process and technology



(Fig.1) The diagram demonstrates the action, the culture and the reaction

Technology is a powerful tool impacting the way in which interdisciplinary designers prototype and ideate design solutions. Design students are increasingly using international systems and tools to familiarize with the global workplace upon graduation. The MFA professors frequently encourage graduate students to move away from their comfort zones and experiment with imported materials and advanced technologies. At the same time, technology is often difficult to trust and requires constant access to achieve refined outcomes. (See. Fig 1)

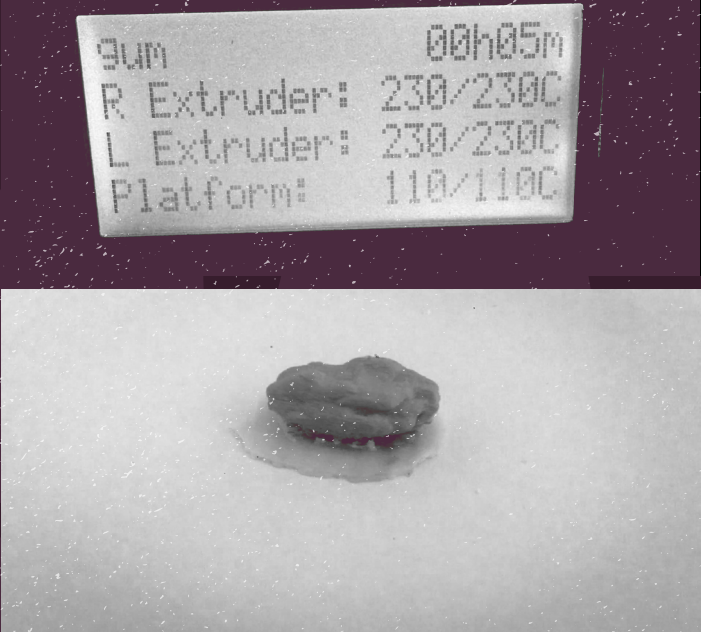
Over the past two years, the VCUQatar MFA workspace, and “Fab Lab,” (fabrication laboratory) have both undergone dramatic changes due to the dual issues of ‘access’ and ‘value.’ In terms of access, MFA students consistently request increased admission to Fab Lab facilities to complete projects or experiment with new technologies. However, regardless of the amount of access granted to the student culture, conflicts arise due to personal interests and the excessive time needed to test and prototype. Due to the MFA Program continually pushing students to experiment with imported technologies and systems, students recently acquired three 3D-printers for use within the shared studio to improve the prototyping process. Rather than improving the iteration procedures, however, students were still unable to meet all the technological demands of the Program. (See Fig.2&3)



(Fig.2&3) Documents that demonstrate the conflict of interests



(Fig.3,4&5) The systems are adapted to the culture



(Fig.6,7,8,9,10&11) Practicing the design process and the execution phase

While strong concepts and ideas should be the driving force, the MFA program tends to calculate the ‘value’ of design based solely on the use of technology. By forcing students to adapt to imported technologies without time to adjust, the notion of ‘value’ is the second issue facing the MFA Program. With a ‘copy and paste’ globalized mentality, there is a lack of understanding about what is productive for all members of the student culture. More to the point, if each student were given a 3D printer, conflicts would still arise; because it’s not about the system, it’s about what works, well for the context (See Fig. 3,4&5).

In response to the MFA Program’s attraction to 3D-printing as an imported phenomena out of synch with the MFA student culture, a hacking methodology of ‘replication’ was adopted to challenge the dominant system. Advanced by the artist Giovanni Innella, this method was originally developed to confront a familiar system by questioning the function and value of a wooden pallet.<sup>1</sup> By replicating an old wooden pallet to symbolize a better quality wood (with the same cracks, marks, and distortions), Innella exposed how the pallet lost its original function and meaning.

Similarly, the hack created to challenge the MFA Program utilized an object that has no value, a piece of gum, that went through a design process and methodologies, by utilizing imported technologies to scan and 3D-print the gum, the aim was to challenge the concepts, tools, and systems encouraged by the dominant MFA culture. (See Fig. 6,7,8,9,10&11)

## To analyze the process:

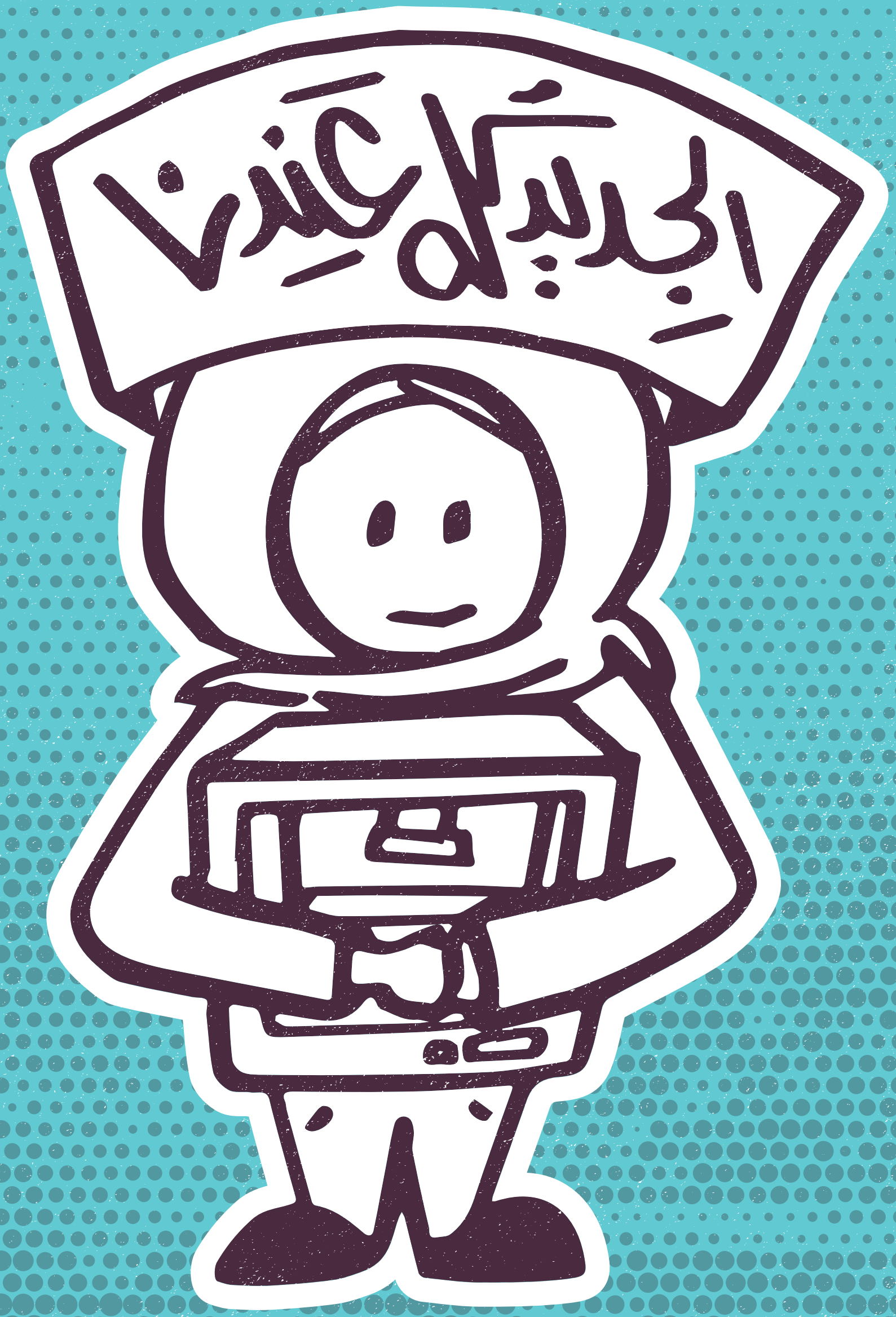
- Gum chewing: 15 minutes
- Gum scanning: 25 minutes for high-resolution / 15 minutes for low-resolution with outsourcing help
- File preparation for 3D-printing: 180 minutes with outsourcing help
- 3D printing the gum: 30 minutes trial one 20 minutes trial two 30 minutes trial three
- 315 minutes in total to produce the 3d printed gum

The resulting 3D-printed gum captured the contrast between chewing a flexible and cheap material, such as the gum, and freezing it with a solid and expensive material, such as PLA and ABS plastic. The 3d printed gum symbolizes the complexity, frustration, work and resources involved in a process with production value superseding the original function of the gum. As such, the value of gum is changed, due to the process it went through.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Innella, “Pallet and Its Representation,” accessed April 9, 2016, <http://www.giovanniinnella.com/design-critique/a-pallet-and-its-representation>.





Translation: We have all the new stuff



## Crack 4: Know me: Local and international exposure



(Fig.1) The diagram demonstrates the action, the culture and the reaction.

Due to a stroke of fortuitous timing in week 6, the MFA culture had the opportunity to showcase its collective works at Design Days Dubai 2016 (DDD). Drawing renowned designers and innovative companies from every corner of the globe, the annual design exhibition provides an international platform to showcase the year's latest and greatest; displaying and selling unique content from the design field. For our showcase, VCUQatar students and faculty utilized a collaborative design approach in creating a portable exhibition. To accommodate for air travel baggage limitations, the designed booth is constructed out of lightweight blue foam, is fully collapsible, and can be brought onboard as a carry-on. Not only that, the blue foam could later be used to display exhibition pieces at DDD<sup>1</sup>. (See Fig. 1)

After we had finished putting together our booth, I quickly noticed there were vast differences in the qualities of work, between the faculty's exhibition pieces, and those of the students. Granted, all the students were still early in the prototyping stage, and nothing we showcased at DDD was for sale; instead, we just wanted to share our ideas with the public, gain experience, and get exposure. The faculties' works, on the other hand, were all fully fleshed-out design pieces; creatively displayed, and finished with expensive materials. Displayed next to the student work, the finished faculty pieces easily drew the bulk of our visitors' attention. In fact, it required from us to explain more about the projects for our audience. (See Fig. 2)

The external systems and influences – the exhibition opportunity at DDD – are embedded in the culture without adapting to the local characteristics. Considering that we were the only educational booth at the exhibition, the culture had a unique opportunity to promote the program. However, since buyers and sellers are the exhibition's primary targets, the situation created a conflict of interests. The culture reached out to this exhibition to get exposure to it, not to sell or commercialize the work; however, most people that approached us were sellers or buyers.



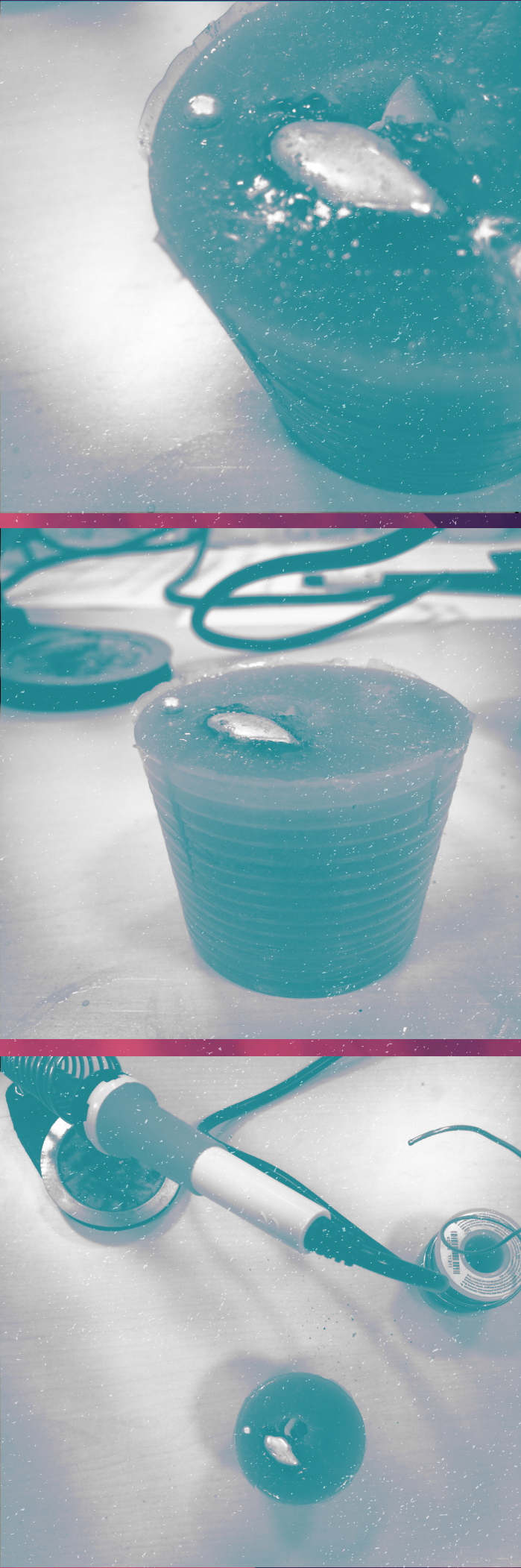
(Fig.2) The process of exhibiting at Design Days Dubai

While at DDD, I reacted to the condition I observed. (See Fig. 3) In the first picture, the students' 3D printed work was displayed next to the faculties' finished works. In the second picture, I moved students' work onto the right side, with faculty work on the left. Once everyone returned, they asked me to put back the students' work next to the faculties work, as shown in the third picture. The failure of this experiment, I believe, was that it obviously did not highlight a crack in a clear enough manner. In the future, I definitely need to make a much bolder statement, so as not to fail in visually representing the crack.



(Fig.3) An examination of the impact of the experiment for the crack

I did another experimentation that made a visual commentary on the crack. I used the gum from crack number three to symbolize the MFA culture's work. The sellable and finished work is what this venue is looking for. Then, I printed the gum with different expensive materials, such as metal or copper, to increase the value of the designed object to get the visitors interested in buying it. (See Fig.4)



(Fig.4) melting and casting tin

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> "VCUQatar Delights at Design Days Dubai | VCUQatar," accessed March 31, 2016, <http://www.qatar.vcu.edu/news/vcuqatar-delights-at-design-days-dubai>.



A hand is shown holding a glowing green, pill-shaped capsule. The capsule has a textured, slightly bumpy surface and is emitting a bright green light. The background is a solid teal color. The entire scene is framed by a dark blue and red geometric pattern.

# COMMERCIALIZE EDUCATION



# Crack 5: Let me: Thesis committee members



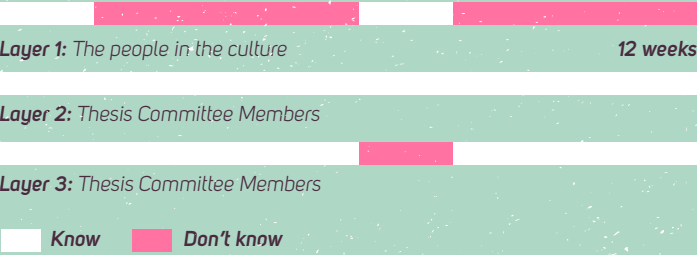
(Fig.1) The diagram demonstrates the action, the culture and the reaction

Over the last eight months, my thesis committee members encouraged and empowered the growth of my thesis topic, pushed for improvements and witnessed its progression. Although equally invaluable to me, the four members of my thesis committee are incredibly different from one another other; to include disciplines, nationalities, interests and personalities. Despite these differences, their collective individuality proved instrumental to my research, as their diverse perspectives helped me deliberate my thesis topic. As the external systems stated, the role(s) of every committee member is one of mentorship and personal guidance; valuable tools to improve student research processes and outcomes<sup>1</sup>. During the investigation, examination and documentation, I observed professors within the culture and their different mentoring and guidance methods, such as pushing towards a specific idea, or applying a particular method. As the methods of communication changed from one professor to another, it was tough to balance their different thoughts and perspectives, and make decisions during this process. (See Fig. 1&2)



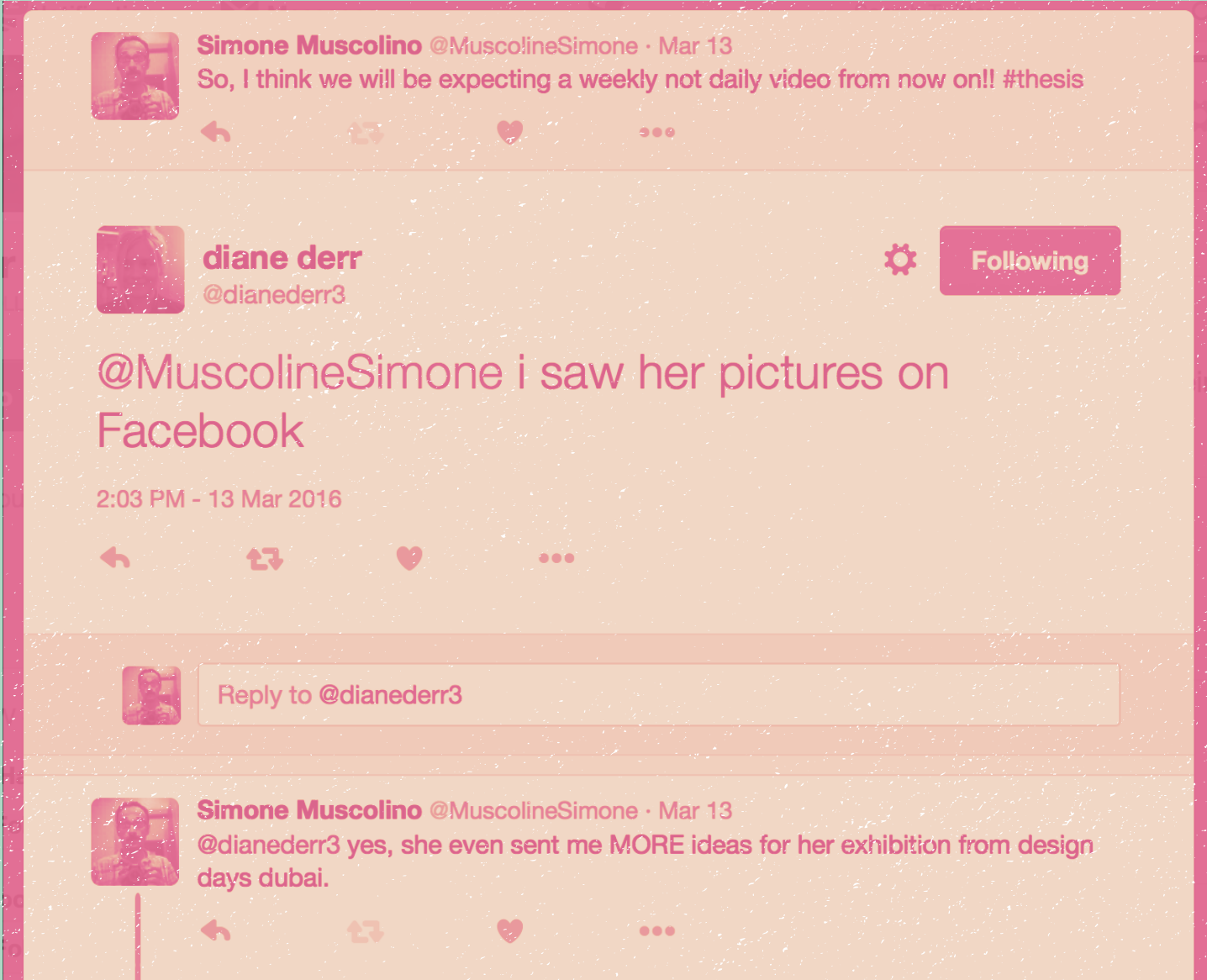
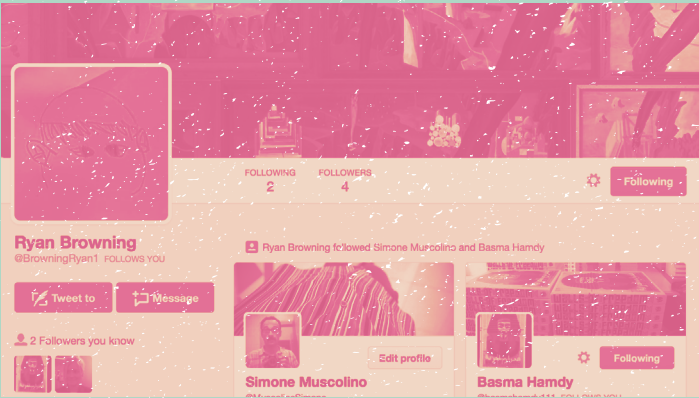
(Fig.2) The method of communication

This diagram shows the complexity of “layers of knowing,” in this process. (See Fig. 3) By week 5, I added another layer, “who knows what.” The scope of this investigation included every student in the MFA program, and one committee member. Due to audience member diversity within the culture, cracks become more apparent when shifting “who knows the whole process” (the committee members) to the “not knowing” side.



(Fig.3) The diagram shows the layers of knowing in this process

I found the reaction to be an interesting one, and so I wanted to visualize the different ideologies and perspectives each person had, and how those differences played into that type of response. Since the audience members are all active social media users, I decided that Twitter would be the best way to visually represent their thoughts and ideas, as it was the same platform they were already comfortable with using.



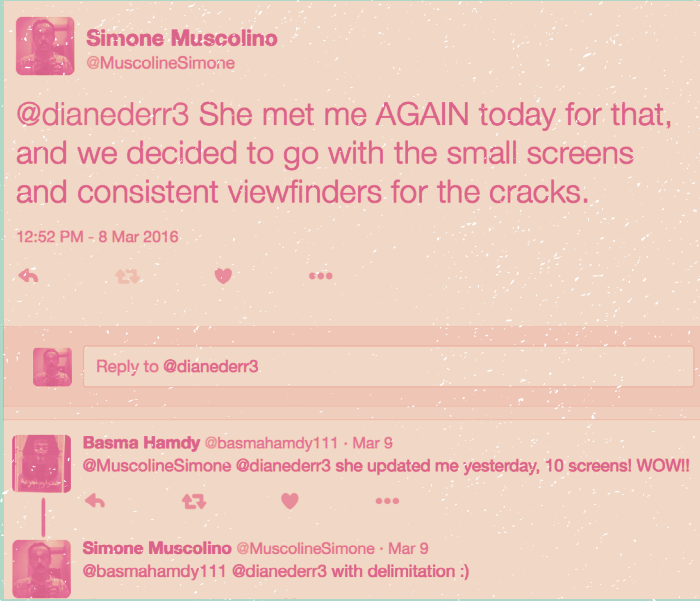
(Fig.4) The threads between the professors

To illustrate real events and conversations between the professors and myself, I used the Egyptianized tools to replicate real scenarios. Using personal information gathered from various other social media platforms, I created fake *Twitter* accounts for each of my professors; mimicking his or her real profile, as closely as possible. Utilizing the fake accounts, I frequently posted tweets for each of my “professors,” employing exaggerated and witty commentaries on the events<sup>2</sup>. For instance, while at Design Days Dubai, I could not upload to my daily vlog, so I uploaded a picture album on Facebook for the trip instead. Making use of the Egyptianized tools, I worked on a scenario, or thread, between two of my professors, illustrating his frustration for failing to upload by the specified time. (See Fig. 4)

After two weeks of producing those fictional tweets, the committee projected the thesis’ timeline from a different perspective. The visual commentary, provided in this investigation, exemplifies the amount of effort required, from the culture and the individuals within to appropriate the external systems and familiarize itself to the context.

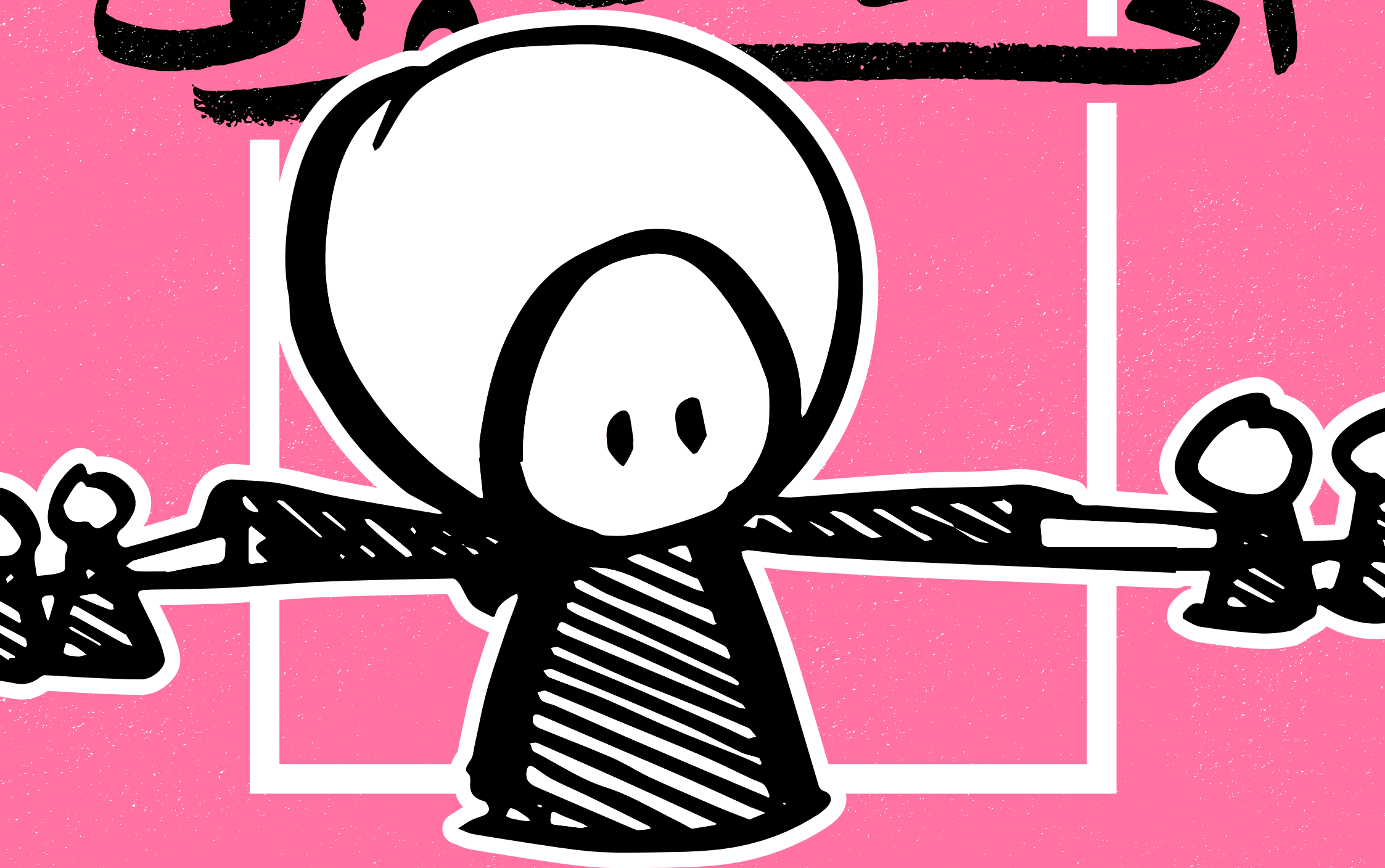
## Notes:

- “MFA in Design Studies Program Handbook 2015 - 2016,” Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, 20, accessed March 27, 2016, <http://www.qatar.vcu.edu/images/uploads/documents/MFA-ProgramHandbook-2015-16.pdf>.
- “Diane Derr (@dianederr3) | Twitter,” accessed April 1, 2016, <https://twitter.com/dianederr3>.



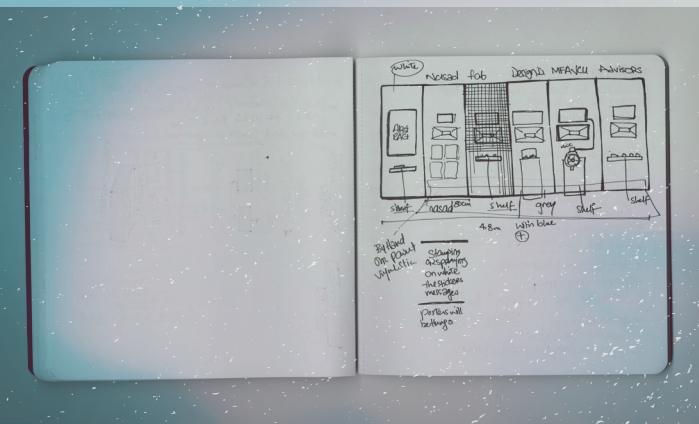
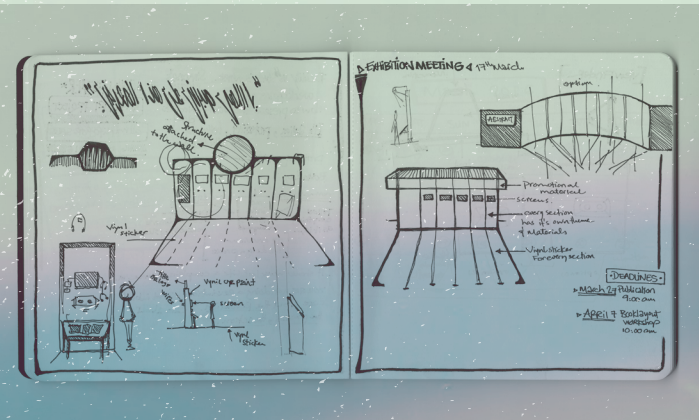


# الثقافة هاف





## Exhibition:



(Fig.1,2&3) The exhibition preparations

The eighth and final phase, exposure and documentation, requires generating an exhibition to showcase at the end of the semester, encapsulating the research process and its outcomes, in its entirety. As a majority of my thesis takes place outside the gallery space, multiple visits are encouraged. The idea is to introduce audience members to the investigation outcomes first, gaining familiarity with the culture and references as their tour of the space progresses. By dividing the wall into five sections, each one linking a crack to its corresponding reference from the culture, revisiting audience members will gain a better understanding of the research and investigative processes; granting them clarity and allowing for increased knowledge of the culture itself. (See Fig. 1,2&3)

## Future direction:

Since the beginning of this investigation, I have been interested in studying what happened to Egyptian culture after the revolution in 2011 and how globalization affects society's daily activities. I am interested in how Egyptians react and adapt to globalized systems and how they might reject new systems due to their longstanding beliefs, rituals, heroes, and values. The methodology for this study used creative practice and culture hacking methodologies to address the research questions through a process of adaptation applied to different systematic models such as institutes, companies, or groups of people following a similar system. Culture hacking is an adjustable, critical practice aimed at identifying the cracks in the system of a unique cultural context.

Appropriating the culture hacking mindset allowed new questions to arise through an examination of innovative design methods and visual communication with the audience. Throughout the intense research process, I realized that uncovering information leads to more cracks, creating an endless cycle of discovery. By finding the link between the question and the audience, creative thinking and implementation can take place. The audience feedback played a critical role in helping examine and analyze the impact of the creative outcome. This mindset will remain part of my creative practice after leaving the MFA program. I am interested in working with both familiar and unfamiliar cultures to adapt my creative lens to continue to observe, discover, and challenge globalized systems.

## Conclusion:

My experiences in Egypt, post the Arab Spring, allowed me to develop a set of design tools. Those tools were adapted to my creative thinking processes and altered the ways that I approach design. I became more engaged with my surroundings, and reflective toward the internal and external conditions in which I found between my circles of identity. By using methodological processes throughout the study and the evaluative framework developed throughout the process enabled me to assess whether cultural evolution is an internally generated process, driven by the individual, or is a byproduct of systematic transformation, powered by external forces. The research questioned my perceptions of culture, expanded my understanding of systems of influence, and familiarized myself with unfamiliar contexts; all the while, adapting to the mindset of a hacker, in the process.

As a result of the investigation, I am now more alert to the information I receive, whenever I am in an unfamiliar context, and more attentive to the different cultural elements. The research has also improved my visual communication skills, and similarly enhanced my abilities to observe, document, analyze, and criticize the implementation of my method within a culture. Being part of an interdisciplinary culture pushed the boundaries of my methodological thinking, as it allowed for the advantageous borrowing of their various methods and tools. As a result, the set of executions are the best representatives of my investigation processes, with the outcomes they produced directly reflect my research goals. People who are in the creative practice or use the design process, could adapt the methodology to their own culture, by finding their own crack, generate their own set of tools that represent their circles and apply the process to achieve improvement, change or even questioning the culture. The hacking process is designed to be adapted, shifted, evolved and appropriated based on the culture's needs. In the contemporary world we are living in, the culture hacking process will allow cultures to bridge values, beliefs, rituals, heroes and symbols. The individual will be able to observe the surroundings and react to the happenings with a critical voice. After a crack is defined and the question asked, people within the culture will respond to the culture hacker. As my research shows, some will reject the idea behind the question, while others will try to find a solution for it. In either case, a voice will be heard. As history has repeatedly shown: it only takes one voice, to address a small gap within a system; one voice, to generate change; one voice, to start a revolution.



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MFA Exhibition:  
At Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, May 2016

